THE FATE OF KING DAVID

THE PAST AND PRESENT OF A BIBLICAL ICON

EDITED BY
TOD LINAFELT,
TIMOTHY BEAL,
AND CLAUDIA V. CAMP

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CONTENTS

Abbreviations ix
List of Contributors xi

Introduction: On David and David xiii
David M. Gunn: A Bibliography xxvii

Part I
RELATING TO DAVID

KING DAVID AND TIDINGS OF DEATH:
"CHARACTER RESPONSE" CRITICISM
Jan Jaynes Quesada 3

DAVID AND ITTAI
Francis Landy 19

A FEAST FIT FOR A KING:
FOOD AND DRINK IN THE ABIGAIL STORY
Mary Shields 38

FOUR VIGNETTES FROM THE LIFE OF DAVID:
RECOLLECTIONS OF THE ROYAL COURT
David Penchansky 55

READING BACKWARDS: A NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE
FOR THE QUEERING OF DAVID, SAUL, AND SAMUEL
Randall C. Bailey 66

Part II
CANONIZING DAVID

HEIR AND LAND:
THE ROYAL "ENVELOPE" OF THE BOOKS OF KINGS
Walter Brueggemann 85

A Broken Hallelujah: Remembering David, Justice, and the Cost of the House
Danna Nolan Fewell 101

Son of David and Son of Saul
Philip R. Davies 123

Part III
Singing David

The Sharper Harper (1 Samuel 16:14–23): Iconographic Reflections on David's Rise to Power
Carole R. Fontaine 135

David and the Psalms: Titles, Poems, and Stories
Robert C. Culley 153

Penitent to a Fault: The Characterization of David in Psalm 51
R. Christopher Heard 163

Psalm 23 and Method: Reading a David Psalm
David J. A. Clines 175

Part IV
Receiving David

Scenes of Textual Repentance and Critique/Confession: King David between the Renaissance and the Reformation, the Secular and the Sacred, and Samuel and Psalms
Yvonne Sherwood 187

From Babylon to David and Back Again: The Sexually Charged History of a Victorian Drawing
Burke O. Long 208

"David on the Brain": Bertolt Brecht's Projected Play "David"
David Jobling 229

A KING FIT FOR A CHILD:
THE DAVID STORY IN MODERN CHILDREN'S BIBLES
J. Cheryl Exum 241

MICHAL AND DAVID: LOVE BETWEEN ENEMIES?
Athalya Brenner 260

Part V
RE-LOCATING DAVID

THROUGH A WINDOW:
A POSTCOLONIALIST READING OF MICHAL
Judith E. McKinlay 273

DAVID W[E]AVES
Jione Havea 289

Index of References 302
Index of Authors 309

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	*Anchor Bible Dictionary*. Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Edited by James B. Pritchard. 3d ed. Princeton, 1969
ANEP	*The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*. Edited by J. B. Pritchard. Princeton, 1954
BASOR	*Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*
BDB	Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford, 1907
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
BWANT	*Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten Testament*
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
BZAW	Beihefte zur *ZAW*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
GKC	Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar. Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2d. ed. Oxford, 1910
HALOT	*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Edited by L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner and J. J. Stamm. Translated by M. E. J. Richardson et al. 4 vols. Leiden, 1994–99
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
ICC	International Critical Commentary
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*: Supplement Series
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
KBL	Koehler, L., and W. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti libros*. 2d ed. Leiden, 1958
KJV	King James Version
KTU	*Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*. Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. AOAT 24/1. Neukirchen–Vluyn, 1976. 2d enlarged ed. of *KTU: The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places*. Edited by M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Münster, 1995 (= *CTU*)
LXX	Septuagint

MT	Masoretic Text
NAB	New American Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version
NJPS	New Jewsish Publication Society Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTS	Old Testament Studies
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
SBTS	Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	*Vetus Testamentum*, Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

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Introduction: On David and David

With the exception of Jesus, there is surely no more familiar biblical figure than King David. Within the Hebrew Bible, his story is central, formative not only in the books of Samuel and Kings, but also in Chronicles, Ruth, and many of the Psalms, which are often contextualized as prayers uttered by David at certain fraught moments in his life. Indeed, David's story also helped shape, in no small way, the gospel conceptions of Jesus, who is presented as his messianic descendent.

King David's post-biblical afterlives have been even grander than his biblical ones. He has been by far the most celebrated subject of the West's most celebrated Renaissance artists, from Donatello and Michelangelo to Caravaggio and Rembrandt. And his stories have been a favorite subject of moral lessons, from the hundreds of popular "character Bibles" of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the thousands of flannel boards and coloring books in Sunday school classes today. No doubt this is why President Bill Clinton, in apologizing publicly for his affair with Monica Lewinsky, could do no better than to invoke David, albeit indirectly, by quoting Ps 51, traditionally understood to be David's confession for his "affair" with Bathsheba. David is the cultural icon of a complexly compelling, a broken but redeemed, masculine godliness. Of course, that is just one of the many ways to read him in the biblical text.

Among biblical scholars, there is surely no more familiar or influential figure in Davidic studies than David M. Gunn. In the course of his academic career, Gunn has been at the forefront of three major revolutions in biblical studies, and David has been central to his work in each one of them. The first was narrative criticism and biblical narratology, which began in the late 1970s and dominated the field for the next two decades. The influence of David Gunn's early articles and his first two books, *The Story of King David* (1978) and *The Fate of King Saul* (1980), on that movement can hardly be exaggerated.[1] In a field dominated by

1. David M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (JSOTSup 6; Sheffield: JSOT, 1978); and *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation*

the disciplines of form-, source-, and redaction-criticism, Gunn modeled a new kind of scholarship, as rigorous in its pursuit of new questions, treating biblical narratives neither as the sedimentary remains of oral traditions nor as archives for reconstructing history but rather as aesthetic works crafted to generate meaning. Biblical scholarship, which had focused unrelentingly on the world behind the text, had to make room for a mode of interpretation that took seriously the literary world of the text itself, as well as the world of readers in front of the text. The literary representations of David and others were front and center; narrative contexts and readers' contexts were equally important to interpretation as historical contexts.

The second revolution in which David Gunn's David played a major role was the rise of feminist criticism and gender theory in the 1980s and early 1990s. Two books, both co-authored with Danna Nolan Fewell, were especially influential: *Compromising Redemption* (1990), a feminist literary critical reading of the book of Ruth, the story of David's great grandmother; and *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (1993), a close reading of Genesis through 2 Kings.[2] Each brought post-structuralist, deconstructive criticism to bear on the constructions of subjectivity in biblical narrative, revealing how sexual and ethnic identity in these stories is unstable and open to subversion. The chapter on David in *Gender, Power, and Promise* ("In the Shadow of the King") was especially significant for its attention to the construction of masculinity and male sexuality in the character of David vis-à-vis other women and men, especially Jonathan—themes Gunn also explored

of a Biblical Story (JSOTSup 14; Sheffield: JSOT, 1980). See also some of the genealogies of these books in the following groundbreaking articles: "Narrative Patterns and Oral Tradition in Judges and Samuel," *VT* 24 (1974): 286–317; "The 'Battle Report': Oral or Scribal Convention?," *JBL* 93 (1974): 513–18; "David and the Gift of the Kingdom," in *Classical Hebrew Narrative* (ed. Robert C. Culley; Semeia 3; Atlanta: Scholars, 1975), 14–45; "Deutero-Isaiah and the Flood," *JBL* 94 (1975): 493–508; "Traditional Composition in the 'Succession Narrative,'" *VT* 26 (1976): 214–29; "From Jerusalem to the Jordan and Back: Symmetry in 2 Samuel XV–XX," *VT* 30 (1980): 109–13; and "A Man Given Over to Trouble: The Story of King Saul," in *Images of Man and God: Old Testament Short Stories in Literary Focus* (ed. Burke O. Long; Bible and Literature 1; Sheffield: Almond, 1981), 89–112, 121.

2. Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Compromising Redemption: Relating Characters in the Book of Ruth* (Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation; Westminster John Knox, 1990); and *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993); see also David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford Bible Series; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

independently in a series of scholarly papers and articles.[3] (Perhaps we should not be surprised that the character Michal, accorded brief but strong subjectivity herself, is the touchstone for several of the essays in this volume, given her relationship both to Saul, as daughter, and to David, as wife.)

The third revolution, currently underway, is the rise of cultural studies and reception history, that is, the exploration of the myriad ways that biblical narratives, images, characters, and even the idea of the Bible itself is figured and refigured in particular cultural contexts. Rather than focusing exclusively on the biblical text in itself, as a literary object, new approaches are exploring the afterlives of this book in literature, music, visual culture, political discourse, and religious communities. Gunn's monumental commentary on Judges is a model for this emerging approach.[4] Equally if not more significant, in our opinion, is his ongoing research and writing on the cultural history of David, especially vis-à-vis Renaissance art and the construction of masculine sexuality in the modern West.[5]

3. Most significantly, "Goliath's Head: Text, Image, and the Subversion of Gender," presented to the Constructs of Ancient History and Religion Group of the SBL, Washington, D.C., 1993; and "Bathsheba Goes Bathing in Hollywood: Words, Images, and Social Locations," in *Biblical Glamour and Hollywood Glitz* (ed. Alice Bach; Semeia 74; Atlanta: Scholars, 1996), 75–101 (first presented in 1994 at the annual meeting of the SBL). See also Gunn's earlier articles and papers that were formative for *Gender, Power, and Promise*: "In Security: The David of Biblical Narrative," in *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus* (ed. J. Cheryl Exum; Semeia Studies; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 133–51; "A Fearful Dominion: Biblical Constructions of Homosexuality," presented to the Reading, Rhetoric, and the Hebrew Bible Section of the SBL, Kansas City, 1991; and "Shifting the Blame: The Character of God in the Garden," presented to the Reading, Rhetoric, and the Hebrew Bible Section of the SBL, San Francisco, 1992.

4. David M. Gunn, *Judges* (Blackwell Bible Commentaries; Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

5. Gunn's research and writing on the cultural history of David has been underway for more than two decades. Articles appearing along the way include: "Goliath's Head: Text, Image, and the Subversion of Gender"; "Interpreting Decapitation: The Bible, Donatello's 'David,' and a Question of Gender," keynote lecture at the Eastern Great Lakes Bible Society, Clinton, Ohio, 1994; "Entertainment, Ideology, and the Reception of 'History' ": "David's Jerusalem' as a Question of Space," in *"A Wise and Discerning Mind": Essays in Honor of Burke O. Long* (ed. Saul M. Olyan and Robert C. Culley; Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2000), 153–61; "Covering David: Michelangelo's David from the Piazza della Signoria to My Refrigerator Door," in *"Imagining" Biblical Worlds: Spatial, Social and Historical Constructs in Honor of James W. Flanagan* (ed. David M. Gunn and Paula M. McNutt; JSOTSup 359; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 139–70.

David Gunn's life journey has been that of a wanderer, often a resident alien; indeed, he has friends who have joked about inviting a homeless man to dinner! Born in Aotearoa New Zealand (the son of a socialist Protestant minister), he moved with his family to Australia at age 13. He received a B.A. (Hon) from Melbourne University in English literature and Greek, and then an M.A. in classics, before returning to New Zealand for a B.D. from the University of Otago. David then went to England to pursue his Ph.D. (at Newcastle-upon-Tyne) and eventually to teach (at Sheffield University). He came in 1984 to the U.S., first to Georgia (Columbia Theological Seminary) and finally to Texas (Texas Christian University), where he became a citizen (of the U.S., not Texas, though Texans sometimes reverse the order!) in 2008, just in time to vote for Barack Obama. A life-long student of politics, David's global, de-centered life has produced not just de-centering readings, but also politicized ones, and the geographically wide-reaching intellectual tentacles of reception history have provided grist for his mill. In particular, his interest in how people come to identify with a land they may or may not at the moment possess led him to investigate the appropriation of the Joshua story by the Maori leader Te Kooti, who fought the British (Pakeha) settlers in Aotearoa.[6] Similarly, returning once more to the David traditions, he considered how the motif of "yearning for Jerusalem" is used toward political ends on the Israel Foreign Ministry homepage.[7]

Clearly, then, the biblical David's life story and the biblical scholar David Gunn's *curriculum vitae* ("course of life") are intertwined. Few if any biblical scholars can think of one without the other.

A word is in order about how this volume came to take the shape it did, and about the editors' hopes for it. *Festschriften* are notorious for being sprawling, conceptually somewhat incoherent tomes, typically full of valuable individual essays, but, well, hard to know where to shelve. In the course of many long discussions, the editors of the present volume realized that we wanted to honor not simply the intellectual contributions of our friend and colleague David Gunn, but also something of his modest, user-friendly temperament and, especially, the way he has given so lavishly of his time and energy in shaping the field and promoting the

6. "Colonialism and the Vagaries of Scripture: Te Kooti in Canaan (A Story of Bible and Dispossession in Aotearoa/New Zealand)," in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann* (ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 127–42.

7. "Yearning for Jerusalem: Reading Myth on the Web," in *The Labour of Reading: Desire, Alienation, and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. Fiona Black, Roland Boer, and Erin Runions; Semeia Studies; Atlanta: Scholars, 1999), 123–40.

work of others, both through personal relationships and a series of editorial projects. Our sense of David as a person led us, first, to envision a more user-friendly sort of *Festschrift*, one that strove for a relatively high degree of thematic coherence and that had potential for classroom use, as well as for research libraries. We must offer, then, more than the usual measure of thanks to the contributors, who dropped whatever else they were doing to write on King David and who tried to write with a wide audience in mind.

David's long-standing work as an editor also comes happily into view in this publication. Among his editorial initiatives have been the Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation series (Westminster John Knox, with Danna Nolan Fewell), the Biblical Limits series (Routledge, with Danna and Gary Phillips), and, with David Clines and Philip Davies, the mother of all Hebrew Bible publishing endeavors, the *Journal for the Old Testament* Supplement Series. The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies, our present venue, stands as successor to the JSOT Supplement Series. In deference to its origins, the re-christened series kept (on David's plea) the old Assyrian lion logo and continued numbering the volumes without a break. As good fortune would have it, volume number 500 (!) in the series came open as this book was in conception, and the press reserved it to honor David, as one of the founding editors. For this we thank the editors at T&T Clark/Continuum.

* * *

One of the pleasures of editing a volume of this nature is the serendipitous process of organizing and thematizing the scholarly gifts that the friends of the honoree bring forward as offerings. Thus the editors offer our readers the following:

In Part I of the book, "Relating to David," authors have deployed a wide range of literary-critical methods to demonstrate how the character of David in 2 Samuel unfolds—or can be unfolded—from his relationships with other characters in the tale. Close reading, with an eye to larger literary patterns, is evident in Jan Quesada's study ("King David and Tidings of Death: 'Character Response' Criticism") of the seven episodes—repetition remarkable enough to count as a type scene in her estimation—in which David is brought news of someone's death. In all seven scenes, the narrative closely attends to David's behavior in response to the grim news. By considering these often dramatic and always significant moments in 2 Samuel's portrait of David, readers can gain fresh insight into the book's complex vision of "the Lord's anointed," who is, above all, a survivor.

Like Quesada, Francis Landy, in "David and Ittai," also attends to the nuances of David's reactions to fraught encounters with other characters—in this case, Ittai, the commander of David's Gathite mercenaries, and Zadok the priest, who brings the Ark of the Covenant with him. Each of these minor characters proposes to accompany David as he flees from Jerusalem during the revolt of his son Absalom, and David turns each back. Both of the incidents exemplify the dialectic between inside and outside and evoke the sense of going home into exile, the future remembered as past. Both exhibit David's rhetorical mastery, his ability, despite his weakness, to manipulate feelings and loyalties; and both evoke a tangle of symbolic, intertextual, and ethnic complexities. With David Gunn, Landy rejects the simple classification of the narrative as pro- or anti-Davidic, and also brings into view the chosen king's complicated relationship with YHWH.

The next three essays in this section continue to "read relationships," but now with the particular interest in gender that has been such a hallmark of David Gunn's career. Mary Shields, in "A Feast Fit for a King: Food and Drink in the Abigail Story," examines one example of David's frequently depicted relationships with women, the story of Abigail in 1 Sam 25. Shields' focus on the details of food and drink in the story leads her to another interpretive move, an intertextual comparison of Abigail with Woman Wisdom in Proverbs[8]—who claims "by me, kings reign!" (Prov 8:15)—arguing that the wise Abigail similarly enables the transition of David, the erstwhile guerilla warrior, to the kingship.

But King David's relationships are often fraught with ambiguity, calling on readerly acts of imagination to fill in gaps in the Bible's typically spare narrative style. Readers seeking to make sense of the motivation of characters, for example, often construct their own scenarios to rationalize characters' underdrawn relationships and actions. Inhibited both by a Protestant view of the Bible's own inherent truth and the evidential norms of the Western interpretive tradition, this readerly activity often takes place quite unconsciously. In contrast, traditional Jewish midrashic interpreters freely added imaginative details to the text, in effect, interpreting through story-telling itself. Adopting this mode, David Penchansky's "Four Vignettes from the Life of David: Recollections of the Royal Court" weaves a larger tapestry out of the hints of characterization in several problematic texts relating to King David,

8. For an example of characterizing by intertextual reading in David Gunn's work, see "Samson of Sorrows: An Isaianic Gloss on Judges 13–16," in *Reading between Texts: Intertextuality in the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Danna Nolan Fewell; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 225–53.

Michal, and Jonathan. The Bible deals with the marriage of Saul's daughter Michal and her second husband Paltiel, for example, in two verses (1 Sam 25:44 and 2 Sam 3:16)—its inauspicious beginning as the result of David's flight from Saul and its poignant ending in Paltiel's tears, as Michal is returned to her victorious first husband. Penchansky fills in the missing middle of the relationship, highlighting the way the two disempowered characters rise (or not) to their fates. David's charisma and physical attractiveness are evident in a vignette that also gives subjectivity to one of the slave women who watched him dance before the Ark, while his capacity for both connection and ruthlessness come through in his "own" recollections about his relationship with Jonathan.

While textual gaps present one sort of problem to the interpreter of biblical narrative, yet another arises with the need to make sense of odd, seemingly superfluous, textual details. One of David Gunn's favorite thought experiments is to imagine a modern painting, at first glance almost entirely blue, but also containing, on closer inspection, a few very small red dots. What then is the painting "about"? Is it a painting about blue? Or is it a painting about the red dots? How will a viewer construct—because it will indeed be the viewer's construction—the relationship between the two?[9] And what does this construction say *about the viewer* as well as about the work? Randall C. Bailey, in "Reading Backwards: A Narrative Technique for the Queering of David, Saul, and Samuel," calls dramatic attention to the way in which readers' ideological perspectives predetermine what they will make of a text's details, indeed, how they will translate the text in the first place. Ironically, he argues, "while feminist hermeneutics has had to explore silences in the text and fill in gaps to reclaim the lives of women, queer male readings have only to do close readings of the text. The problem is that we have all been trained to read along with the canons of heteronormativity." Moving past previous arguments for a homoerotic relationship between David and Saul's son, Jonathan, Bailey uncovers "cover up translations" that deflect homosexual possibilities for the biblical characters. Given the clearly sexual meaning of the phrase "delight in" in the book of Esther, for example, why would we not admit to that possibility not only for Jonathan's, but also for Saul's, feelings for David? Through the strategy of "reading backwards," from (narratively) later texts to earlier

9. See, for example, the study of Lot's wife in Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, 56–67, and also Gunn's attention to the variant details of Goliath's death in "What Does the Bible Say? A Question of Text and Canon," in *Reading Bibles, Writing Bodies: Identity and the Book* (ed. Timothy K. Beal and David M. Gunn; London: Routledge, 1996), 242–61.

ones, Bailey queers a wider range of David's relationships, with Saul and Samuel as well as with Jonathan.

We note, then, the range of literary methodologies in which David Gunn's pioneering work in literary criticism has borne fruit: through formalizing (as type-scene) or thematizing (as wisdom) their texts, Quesada and Shields allow textual details to collect around their respective foci, and thus build meaning from them. Penchansky, on the other hand, by noticing textual gaps, finds spaces to pour possible meanings into the narrative, while Bailey fixates on repeated but fleeting textual details, forcing readers to notice how our preconceptions determine from what our eyes will flee. Landy, in yet another narratological move, lets sometimes similar (but never identical) and sometimes discordant textual details bump up against each other, and observes some of their trajectories, without settling on a single or centered reading. Landy's analysis of the Zadok episode evokes, among other things, a poetic and ritual sensibility, including psalmic metaphors. It thus provides a transition to a different set of roles and connections of David in the Hebrew Bible, namely, the singer and musician of the Psalms, which a number of our contributors take up directly in Part III.

Part II of the book, "Canonizing David," lingers yet a little while longer, however, with the David of the narratives, though now expanding the circle outwards from its core in 1 and 2 Samuel. In the larger canonical picture, the significance of King David grows from that of a literary character in relationships to both humans and God to that of an icon embodying and mediating social identity and theological meaning, while remaining multivalent and contested. Thus, as Walter Brueggemann comments in "Heir and Land: The Royal 'Envelope' of the Book of Kings," "it is clear that David functioned in ancient Israel over time as a supple generative cipher in the ongoing interpretive process." Brueggemann offers a canonical and intertextual reading of the promise near the beginning of the books of Kings (1 Kgs 2:1–4), a promise of both lineage and land to the Torah-obedient king, in light of the ambiguous conclusion in 2 Kgs 25:27–30 and certain prophetic texts. He argues that the move from the contested metaphor of David to the contested metaphor of Jehoiachin requires an indeterminate understanding God's threats and promises when faced with the reality of a king without a land.

Danna Nolan Fewell's "A Broken Hallelujah: Remembering David, Justice, and the Cost of the House" contrasts the Chronicler's story of David with the story found in the books of Samuel. The latter is a post-exilic act of memory and "true" mourning that confronts an indigestible

past, one which can be neither fully remembered nor forgotten; Chronicles' "successful mourning," on the other hand, recounts a past that is easily digestible, consoling, and is designed to make the community forget its pain. Chronicles is not seen here as a revision of Samuel; rather, these are two "histories" with competing but radically different efforts to remember and mourn the past and envision the future. The essay offers a different model of understanding the functions of such stories in a community under Empire.

The last essay of Part II, Philip R. Davies's "Son of David and Son of Saul," highlights the on-going contestation of the King David icon even in early Christian literature, noting that precisely the monarchic title "Messiah," otherwise one of the key New Testament attributions for Jesus, is absent from the writings of Saul/Paul. The reasons for this may be various, but in the absence of any compelling theological motive, Davies suggests that the apostle was too proud of his name and his ancestry to talk easily of "David" (except as prophet) or even to call himself a "Judean." By looking at Paul and Jesus as a replay of Saul and David, the essay offers a psychological profile of Paul as someone who avoids any kingly titles (such as messiah).

King David's most notable canonical connection is, of course, with the Psalter, and our four contributors to Part III, entitled "Singing David," move from the harpist of the narrative to the iconic singer-songwriter of the Psalms. Carole R. Fontaine's "A Sharper Harper (1 Samuel 16:14–23): Iconographic Reflections on David's Rise to Power" argues that the passage that introduces David as a harper taken into Saul's service for treatment of mental illness is often overlooked for its political implications. Her survey of the representation of harpers in action in Egyptian and Assyrian art suggests that David learned more than new songs while playing in the court of Saul. Harping and political intrigue, often with deadly outcomes, are part of a "genre" of representation of court scenes, and serve as a touchstone of the realia behind this pericope.

Robert Culley and David Gunn first became acquainted around their shared interest in oral literature. David, originally a classics guy, wrote a masters thesis at Melbourne University analyzing Homer in terms of Serbo-Croatian epic tales.[10] David recalls Robert's early encouragement to pursue these interests in the context of biblical studies, and his earliest published work in the field of biblical studies dealt with oral forms in the

10. His earliest scholarly publications were in top-tier journals of classical philology: "Narrative Inconsistency and the Oral Dictated Text in the Homeric Epic," *American Journal of Philology* 91 (1970): 192–203; and "Thematic Composition and Homeric Authorship," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 75 (1971): 1–31.

books of Samuel.[11] It seems fitting, then, that Robert returns to their common bond in "David and the Psalms: Titles, Poems, and Stories," where he takes up the question: what happens when the traditional poetic language of the complaint psalms is linked to the prose tradition of stories about David, also marked by the dense repetition-with-variation of traditional oral forms? The poems and the stories have different strategies that go in different directions. Because the poems move away from specific persons and situations toward a more general perception of what it means to be in trouble, readers who wish to apply them to themselves must turn the generality of the poems back toward the specific. The stories, on the other hand, move toward the specific and particular: they are "replete with details about the difficult situation of David facing an enemy, always identified and usually Saul." But, as with all literature, these stories remain open to the general. The interplay of different kinds of discourse and their strategies allows the consideration of other dimensions of the larger figure of David within the tradition as a whole.

R. Christopher Heard, in "Penitent to a Fault: The Characterization of David in Psalm 51," also considers the relationship between the entitled David of the Psalms (in this case the famous penitential psalm) and the differently entitled David of the narrative, whose heinous crimes of murder and adultery provoke the need for penitence. A more suspicious reader than most in the David-exculpating tradition, Heard suggests that the superscription of the psalm recasts the psalm's penitential prayer in an ironic light. Whereas the confession by the poem's unidentified penitent represses the memory of the human victims of sin, the superscription's recollection of David's story returns our attention to them. Heard also points to a larger social context for the psalm, observing that David's often vaunted non-sacrificial penitence threatens to victimize, in a quite different way, the cultic functionaries who depend on sacrifices for their livelihood.

In a quite different turn, David Clines's "Psalm 23 and Method: Reading a David Psalm" leads this quintessential Davidic psalm through a series of methodological moves: rhetorical criticism, deconstruction, gender criticism, materialist criticism, post-colonial criticism, and psychoanalytic criticism. The readings hinge on the initial rhetorical-critical observation regarding the quirkily metaphorized subjectivity of the poem: David, the shepherd of sheep, imagines himself the sheep of a shepherd; or, alternatively, an Israelite poet imagines himself as a shep-

11. "Narrative Patterns and Oral Tradition in Judges and Samuel," *VT* 24 (1974): 286–317; and "The 'Battle Report': Oral or Scribal Convention?," *JBL* 93 (1974): 513–18.

herd imagining himself as a sheep. If, as Clines argues, this metaphor persists throughout the poem, it has surprising implications when subjected to the other methods, for example, the sheep who ends up in Jerusalem, as does this psalmist, ends up dead. The oft-quoted Ps 23 will never seem familiar again!

Part IV of the book, "Receiving David," comprises five essays that respond to the forward edge of David Gunn's work, his move into cultural studies, especially in the form of reception history. The long history of the King David's re-presentations in visual and literary art is a monument to creative gap filling, evidenced here first in Yvonne Sherwood's "Scenes of Textual Repentance and Critique/Confession: King David between the Renaissance and the Reformation, the Secular and the Sacred, and Samuel and Psalms." Yvonne adds to David's long-standing work on David and Bathsheba with a poem by Theodore of Beza entitled "A Poetic Preface to David's Penitential Psalms." Beza's verbose and elegant Latin poem, written prior to his conversion (the story of which is itself a literary construct built out of biblical materials), is a composite theater of the biblical and classical, in which David and Bathsheba meet Venus, Cupid, and Hera. The poem dramatizes the Renaissance/Reformation merger between *humanitas* and *divinitas*, evincing the Bible's cultural cringe in the face of the Classics: the perceived need to supplement the sparseness of biblical style.

Burke Long, in his "From Babylon to David and Back Again: The Sexually Charged History of a Victorian Drawing," follows the cultural-reception history of Simeon Solomon's pen and ink drawing, originally entitled "Babylon" (1859). He investigates how what began as a sexually charged representation of Babylon, with an allusion to Jer 51:7, migrated to the books of Samuel as the original work received new titles in subsequent exhibitions: "King David" in 1939, and "David Playing Before Saul" in 1985. This trajectory mirrors, in the first place, the artist's own changes in status from a publicly disgraced, penniless, and forgotten transgressor of Victorian sexual propriety to celebrated contemporary gay icon and, in the second place, the revitalized reception of the Saul/David/Jonathan narratives as sexually ambiguous invitation to transgressive readings.

The very young Bertolt Brecht (around age 22) conceived an ambitious play about the biblical David and left substantial fragments of it. "'David on the Brain': Bertolt Brecht's Projected Play 'David'," David Jobling's contribution to the book, is a study of these fragments, with some general comments about how Brecht can help us not only to read Samuel, but also to "stage" David. One part of the Brechtian fragments

shows the author taking a fragmentary approach to the biblical story, with its chronology collapsed and the moral coding of its characters, such as it is, re-worked (Uriah, for example, is no longer David's victim, but plays a duplicitous double game with David and Absalom). Other parts of Brecht's notes show David as a youth, with Saul, and then in old age reflecting back on his past. Jobling suggests that, while "youth" was Brecht's initial impulse for tackling the David story, "His final concept for 'David' indicates that he accepted one of the great gifts that the Jewish Bible—not the New Testament—has to offer: the depiction of a whole life lived."

J. Cheryl Exum, in "A King Fit for a Child: The David Story in Modern Children's Bibles," asks: Is the Bible an unsuitable book for children? How does one tell Bible stories in a manner suitable for small children? As Exum observes, the "many collections of Bible stories for children…all make decisions about how to present 'unsavory' material, and their solutions range from simple omission to tasteful reshaping." Her survey of selected children's Bible centers on two questions related to their portrayals of the character of King David: first, whether they give any indications of his possibly ambiguous motives during his rise to kingship, and, second, how they deal with "unsuitable" material like his adultery with Bathsheba, the murder of her husband, and long-term aftermath of David's choices in the ruined and ruinous lives of his children. Exum concludes that omissions and softenings of harsh details produce not only a less complex and less interesting David, but also a less complex and less interesting God. Lest we take such saccharine for granted as the price of youth or piety, however, Exum challenges us with a reminder of the success of J. K. Rowling's richly characterized and morally complex Harry Potter novels.

Athalya Brenner's "Michal and David: Love between Enemies?" might be seen, in one sense, as a companion piece to David Penchansky's essay in this collection, insofar as both use a midrashic mode to fill characterological gaps in this portion of the David narrative. Brenner's piece subtly complicates this process, however, with reference not only to midrash but also to current cultural studies, reading the biblical texts in conversation with a film and a novel. Brenner writes with a feminist ideological agenda as well, "to construct a Michal story" that will make the fragments of this tale "make sense for *'her,'* not only for her male kin." Her multi-part midrash then "multi-focalizes" Michal after the manner of Akira Kurosawa's famous film *Rashomon*, offering different perspectives on her relationships with David, Saul, and Jonathan that

derive from the fragments of the biblical text, but are also informed by the complex relational nuances of Isaac Bashevis Singer's novel *Enemies: A Love Story*.

In Part V, "Re-locating David," the book returns (?) David (one or another of them) to (or near) his islands of origin or, alternatively, uproots and re-plants him again or altogether. Aware of the Euro-American scholarly tradition of uncritical (despite the claims to objectivity of "higher criticism") and culturally self-aggrandizing appropriation of the Bible to its own political-cultural center, contemporary scholars from elsewhere on the globe often display a *self*-critical consciousness in their readings. The doubled vision of a white (Pakeha) citizen of David Gunn's first home, Aotearoa New Zealand, informs Judith McKinlay's "Through a Window: A Postcolonialist Reading of Michal." The essay uses the methodological tools of literary, feminist, and ideological criticisms, but also follows the call of postcolonial scholars to read biblical narratives in dialogue with those of the reader's own context. Like Brenner, then, McKinlay also reads the narrative of Michal in dialogue with a novel, in this instance Fiona Kidman's historical novel, *The Book of Secrets*, based on a religious settler community in Aotearoa New Zealand. Judith's own critical but strong subjectivity comes through in her on-going reflection on her own reading process, as well as in the choice of the novel itself, which involves events her ancestors were a part of.

Jione Havea imagines a storytelling event that imitates storytelling events in South Seas island cultures, including his own native Tonga, an "exercise in rocking upon the waves of storytelling." Set as a play with many different characters, some biblical and some not, Havea retells the story of Bathsheba with multiple voices that "weave and wave [at] David." Strikingly included among these voices are those of various sorts of tradents—narrator, storyteller, scribe, chronicler—whose presence further complicates the relationships of the biblical *dramatis personae*. Havea foregrounds the voice of the storyteller who, in island tradition, is not bound to the narrator or the listeners, as well as the mumbles and asides of different laborers. The result is "a sea of stories, …confluent, wavy, and restless." Indeed.

* * *

Of all biblical figures, King David has perhaps the most productively opaque of inner lives. Although biblical narrative tends as a rule to give only the most sparing access to the inner lives of characters, nowhere

else does the movement of the plot and the reaction of the reader depend so crucially on such inaccessible information. We simply do not know, in situation after situation, both public and private, what David is thinking or feeling or intending.[12] Consequently, we as readers often do not know how to respond to this David, whose charisma seems too often trumped by his ruthlessness and whose actions seem too often driven by blunt self-interest. In this at least, the biblical David could not be more different from David Gunn. Any one who has had dealings with the latter David will attest to his warmth and generosity, to his passion and exuberance, and to his willingness to forego self-interest if it means helping a friend (or acquaintance, or stranger). It is hard to imagine anyone more giving of his time or more honestly demonstrative, whether the latter take the form of praise or of a needed critical judgment. This makes our David something of an anomaly in an academic culture that tends to conceive of scholarship as a solitary pursuit and that encourages and rewards individual achievement. Teaching, mentoring, collegiality, and friendship matter far more to our David than do the accolades that come along with individual achievement; though as for that, he somehow manages both. And so we are pleased to offer this volume of essays as a tribute to both Davids: the one who remains distant (in time and otherwise), and the one we are glad to have more near. Both command our respect, but only one are we pleased to call our friend.

12. As Danna Fewell and David Gunn have pointed out, "while several characters in the story are said to love David, nowhere unambiguously is David ever said to love anyone" (*Gender, Power, and Promise*, 150).

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Part I

RELATING TO DAVID

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King David and Tidings of Death: "Character Response" Criticism

Jan Jaynes Quesada

Who is David? An oft-repeated adjective for him among contemporary commentators is: "complex." He is certainly that. Fully rounded, brave, lucky, lethal, loyal to Yahweh, self-confident, self-involved, guerilla warrior, fugitive, actor, trickster, poet, musician, lover, friend, adulterer, father, uncle, son-in-law to the king, king himself. He is many things. He is assuredly the centerpiece of the Deuteronomistic History. In his ruthlessness and covenant fidelity, Joshua prefigures David's vital strengths. In its portrait of lawlessness and disorder, the book of Judges makes abundantly clear the Israelite tribes' need for a king to subdue and govern them. In the Song of Hannah, the image of Yahweh's ideal anointed king hovers hopefully over the beginning of the books of Samuel. In Saul, we meet David's anti-type and foil: a man large in stature, but given to self-doubt, impulsive, unlucky, divinely doomed and rejected. Within the context of the Deuteronomistic History, David is the main event. Joshua, Judges, and 1 Sam 1–15 were simply the opening acts, priming the crowd and pumping up its appetite for the hero's star turn. After David's death, 1 and 2 Kings are largely anti-climactic. In terms of narrative structure, however, the David–Bathsheba–Uriah–Nathan affair of 2 Sam 11 and 12 is the turning point, not only of David's reign, but also of the History itself.[1] As presently positioned, these chapters lead, inexorably, to the rebellion of Absalom and its messy aftermath. The rest of the History sometimes seems to be the staggered denouement to these events.

Punctuating the David story at key intervals are close-up scenes of him responding to news of death. The first such scene—David receiving second-hand news that the surly Nabal has died and reacting with pious

1. Robert Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 120, states: "…2 Samuel 12 is the hermeneutic center of the entire royal history."

satisfaction—predates David's elevation to kingship in Judah and contrasts with his response to the politically expedient deaths that follow. Second Samuel opens with David learning from an Amalekite that Saul and Jonathan have not survived a brutal battle with the Philistines on Mount Gilboa. David's response to this intelligence garners extended narrative attention, as it will in six instances in the ensuing chapters, culminating with the king's poignant response to his son Absalom's death. The first three instances of news involve the House of Saul. The final three[2] involve David's own sons. The central, hinge narrative among these occasions relates to the death of Uriah—the Hittite, the loyal mighty man, the cuckold. All seven scenes contain intriguing repetitions and variations, but they share the narrative's almost cinematic presentation of the king's words and actions when he learns that key individuals have died. The reader is repeatedly drawn in close to hear and to observe the king in these pivotal moments of crisis, and to take the measure of the man. What emerges is a type-scene[3] which invites the reader to engage in "character response" criticism, to attend carefully to David's reactions when he hears that someone close to him or his throne has died.

In his fine study of the Absalom narratives, Charles Conroy warns, "The search for chiasmus and other forms of structural geometry appears at times to exert a fatal fascination on students of Biblical texts."[4] Nevertheless, when thematic and narrative events appear repeatedly, the reader must take note and attend to both the pattern and its narrative effects—especially in terms of how these royal responses to tidings of death build up and nuance the portrait of David. Scene by scene, David emerges in

2. Alfons Schulz, "Narrative Art in the Books of Samuel," in *Narrative and Novella in Samuel: Studies by Hugo Gressmann and Other Scholars, 1906–1923* (ed. D. M. Gunn; trans. D. E. Orton; Sheffield: Almond, 1991), 119–70. Schulz observes of the book of Samuel, "The entire book stands under the law of threes…" (p. 142), a claim that he proceeds to illustrate in the space of three pages.

3. I am using this term according to the literary-critical precedent of Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981), 50–62. Alter proposes the existence of "a series of recurrent narrative episodes attached to the careers of biblical heroes that are analogous to Homeric type-scenes in that they are dependent of the manipulation of a fixed constellation of predetermined motifs. Since biblical narrative characteristically catches its protagonist only at the critical and revealing points in their lives, the biblical type-scene occurs not in the rituals of daily existence but at the crucial junctures in the lives of the heroes, from conception and birth to betrothal to deathbed" (p. 51). Although Alter identifies a menu of such type-scenes, he does not identify "the response to news of death" among them.

4. Charles Conroy, *Absalom, Absalom! Narrative and Language in 2 Sam 13–20* (AnBib 81; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1978), 145.

stark relief as a loyal friend and subject, a savvy political operator, a callous conspirator, a humble supplicant, a grieving father, and a man who signals that he had no hand in the deaths. By considering these often dramatic and always significant moments in 2 Samuel's portrait of David, the reader can gain fresh insight into the text's multifaceted vision of "the Lord's anointed," who is all too often a *ben-mawet*, a "man (deserving) of death"? A son of death? A child of death?[5] A fiend of hell?![6]

"Mourner in Chief": Part I

"And it happened after the death of Saul…"—this, the first phrase of 2 Samuel, identifies Saul's demise as the watershed that it is, both in the life of David and of the tribal kingdom Israel. Before the next phase of the story begins in earnest, the reader knows that David is now the sole surviving "anointed" one. David is at Ziklag, where he had been for *two* days after he and his men returned from defeating the Amalekites (2 Sam 1:1). On the biblically resonant "third day," a figure stumbles into David's camp from Saul's. He bears the signs of mourning—rent clothes and dust on his head—and he does dramatic obeisance to David by falling to the ground and bowing low. The scene unfolds with urgent questions from David as to who this young man is and what news he has. The narrator informs us of his news: that the battle between Saul's troops and the Philistines had turned into a rout and that Saul and Jonathan are among the dead. David presses for more information with the question: "How do you know?" (v. 5a). This question opens up an extended (and, as Polzin notes, "discrepant" from 1 Sam 31[7]) account by the Amalekite youth of what he *says* he witnessed on Mount Gilboa, and how he came into possession of the emblems of kingship—Saul's crown and arm band—which he has brought with him. In the Amalekite's story, the mortally wounded Saul—asking "Who are you?"—becomes the questioner of this young bystander who "happened to be" in the area of the battle. Then, ironically (?), the king commanded the *Amalekite*: "finish

5. GKC, 418, identifies Martin Luther's translation of *ben-mawet* in 2 Sam 12:5, as "*ein Kind des Todes*."

6. P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel* (AB 9; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 299. McCarter notes that the phrase literally translates as "a son of death," but argues: "This expression does not mean 'one who is as good as dead' or 'one who deserves to die,' as commonly supposed… In other words, David, by calling the rich man *ben mawet*, is characterizing the man's behavior, not condemning him to death." McCarter's translation is, instead, "a fiend of hell," or a "damnable fellow."

7. Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 1.

me off/kill me, for I am in agony and am barely alive" (v. 9b). Accordingly, the young man complied and then removed the crown from Saul's head and the armlet from his arm and brought them to David's camp, and to David whom he addresses as his "lord" (v. 10).

This passage teems with intriguing intertexts and interpretive possibilities. In its multiple mentions of Amalekites, it recalls the bloody ban against them pronounced by Yahweh to Samuel and conveyed to Saul; Saul's failure to carry it out fully; Samuel's grief and wrath at Saul's failure and Yahweh's resulting rejection of Saul's kingship; as well as Samuel's hacking to death "before the Lord" Agag, the king whose life Saul had spared. The passage also prompts questions regarding who is telling the truth and who is lying and who knows precisely what. A more disquieting possibility is that the Amalekite is a prisoner of war turned fall-guy onto whose corpse David's camp (?) / the historian (?) lays blame for David's possession of Saul's royal emblems.[8]

Nevertheless, the narrative certainly centers on David, on his remove from Mount Gilboa and his former Philistine hosts, his lack of first-hand knowledge, his reception of this news, and his grieving response. His response to the tale unfolds in several stages. Initially, he and his men engage in appropriate funerary behavior, demonstrating their grief with torn clothes, lamentation, weeping, and fasting *until evening* (v. 12). They mourn for Saul and his son Jonathan, and the soldiers of the Lord, and the House of Israel (v. 13) fallen by the sword. Then, David's attention returns to the young man. He asks, "Where are you from?" (v. 13). The young man answers not with a location but with an invocation of resident alien status and Amalekite ethnic identity. David's final question is rhetorical and fatal: "How did you dare…?" He circles back to the sacrosanct status of Saul as "the Lord's anointed," and he orders the foreign supposed-regicide struck down by an attendant. It is David's first official action as king. Following the young man's execution, David pronounces himself blameless of guilt, and attributes to the youth a claim even one so naïve or duplicitous did not utter: "I put to death the Lord's anointed!" (v. 16).

Next, David sings a dirge he apparently composed for Saul and his son Jonathan, the Song of the Bow, to be taught to the sons of Judah and preserved in the Book of Jashar. This song, David's second official action

8. James C. VanderKam, "Davidic Complicity in the Deaths of Abner and Eshbaal: A Historical and Redactional Study," *JBL* 99 (1980): 529 n. 27. Regarding the Amalekite's membership in the people David had just defeated, VanderKam notes, "This raises the possibility that a confession regarding Saul's death was planted on the lips of a prisoner of war who was then executed for the purpose of public relations. But this is simply speculation…"

as king, memorializes the glorious dead, the mighty men lying slain upon the heights. The words reiterate David's estrangement from the Philistines, celebrate the heroism of Jonathan and Saul, assert their right to be properly and nationally mourned, and conclude with an intimate coda about the unique and wonderful love he shared with the former crown prince, Jonathan. Thus, David deploys his own weapons, behavioral and rhetorical and poetic, to assure his fellow Judeans and brother Israelites (and the reading audience) that he was a loyal friend of the House of Saul. Though he was the principal beneficiary of the deaths of King Saul and Prince Jonathan, he was in no way involved. David honors their memory with his song,[9] even as he also embeds his innocence in the minds of his future subjects who learn it. The Song of the Bow is both anthem and alibi.

"Mourner-in-Chief": Part II

The second chapter of 2 Samuel recounts David's resettlement in Hebron and his public anointing as king of Judah, as well as the war games that got out of hand between the Judean forces under the sons of Zeruiah and the men under Abner's command. Chapter 3 culminates with another tale of murder and royal reaction. Even more than ch. 1, this chapter practically *stutters* with protestations of David's innocence. Disaffected with his master and Saul's successor Ish-baal (*Ish-bosheth*, Heb.), Abner presents himself to David to offer up his loyalty and the loyalty of the tribes of Israel. Well pleased with this prospect, David fetes Abner and his company of men before sending him away "in peace." Three times in as many verses, the narrator assures the reader that David "dismissed" Abner, who "had gone away unharmed/in peace" (vv. 21–23). Just then, Joab returns at the head of a successful raiding party loaded with plunder and gets word of Abner's visit. Confronting David and scolding him for naïve association with a spying enemy, Joab takes matters into his own savage hands. He sends messengers to recall Abner, takes him aside in the Hebron gate, and eviscerates him on the spot. The narrator makes two observations regarding this murder: first, "David knew nothing about it" (v. 26b), and, second, Joab carried it out in revenge for Abner "shedding the blood of Asahel, Joab's brother" (v. 27).

9. For an in-depth and insightful treatment of David's characterization, especially through his songs in 2 Samuel, see K. L. Noll, *The Faces of David* (JSOTSup 242; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997). Noll observes, "…this Lament extols its fallen heroes above and beyond what is necessary to accomplish David's propagandistic goals" (p. 108).

Although he accepted Joab's panicky rebuke in silence,[10] David makes extensive and emphatic response to news of Abner's death. David swears his, and his kingdom's, innocence of the crime. Although he had ordered the execution of the nameless Amalekite messenger in ch. 1, David does not demand the life of this assassin, his nephew and military strongman. Instead, the king covers Joab with a harrowing curse—on him and his father's house. The narrator, as if to soften or deflect the body blows of the curse (*or*, to explain why David refrains from executing the murderer), reiterates Joab's motivation as vengeance in a blood feud (v. 30). David orders Joab and his troops to tear their clothes and lament for Abner. The king is, again, the very public "mourner in chief," who "walked behind the bier," "wept aloud by Abner's grave," and "intoned [a] dirge" over the slain man (vv. 31–33). Unlike his elaborate encomium for Saul and Jonathan, David's dirge for Abner is brief. It is also not about the dead man's feats and qualities, but rather about the circumstances of his murder:

> Should Abner have died the death of a churl (*nabal*!)?
> Your hands were not bound,
> Your feet were not put in fetters;
> But you fell as one falls
> Before treacherous men!

David's disavowal of his involvement in the murder stands uppermost in this lament.[11] Weeping troops, and attentive readers, serve as witnesses.

Also, as with his response to news that Saul and Jonathan had died, David fasts until sundown. Even though his solicitous men urge him to eat, he refuses with an oath. According to the narrator, David's public persona pleases and persuades his immediate audience: "All the people took note of it and approved, just as all the people approved everything else the king did. That day all the people and all Israel knew that it was not by the king's will that Abner son of Ner was killed" (vv. 36–37). The totalizing language smacks of overstatement, and, as many critics have noted, of "protesting too much."[12] Finally, as David had proclaimed the

10. VanderKam, "Davidic Complicity," 533, writes, "A striking feature of the scene in which Joab excoriates his royal master (2 Sam 3:24–25) is the complete silence of David."

11. Noll, *The Faces of David*, 85, writes, "It is as though David wishes to convince others (and perhaps himself?) that Abner's death is another stage in Yahweh's mysterious patronage, not the brutal assassination which it is in story-world reality."

12. Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). McKenzie seems to be in accord with McCarter in his interpretation of the apologetic dimensions of the Rise of David and the Court History. McKenzie

guilt of the Amalekite and displaced blame from himself in the deaths on Mount Gilboa, so David concludes his response to news of Abner's death with a last (lame) excuse: he announces his inability to control these violent men, the sons of Zeruiah, who are too strong for a weak but anointed king such as himself. Vengeance will be the Lord's, he piously foretells. Nevertheless, another political rival has been dispatched to David's ultimate benefit and in causal relationship to the third scene in 2 Samuel in which David learns of still another violent death.

Vengeance: Divine or Royal?

Second Samuel 4 opens with Ishbaal's reaction to news of Abner's death, along with all Israel. Both are alarmed, dismayed. No public funerary rites or acts of mourning are described, however. Instead, the narrative turns immediately to an account of Ishbaal's murder by two of his own commanders, the brothers Baanah and Rechab, sons of Rimmon.[13] These two men enter the king's unguarded house in the heat of the day, while he is resting in his bed, and kill him by striking him in the belly. After beheading Ishbaal, the two brothers escape and travel all night to take their gruesome trophy to David at Hebron. Presumably, they expect that David will reward them for their deed, because they address him with this pronouncement: "Here is the head of your enemy, Ishbaal son of Saul, who sought your life. This day the Lord has avenged my lord the king upon Saul and his offspring" (v. 8). They gild their brutal act by ascribing it as the vengeance of "the Lord," the one who will repay the wicked for their wickedness, according to David's own statement in the wake of Abner's death.

Once again, the narrative zeroes in on David's reply to tidings of a Saulide's death. With an oath and a direct reference to the fate of the Amalekite, "the one who told me in Ziklag that Saul was dead," and who "*thought* he was bringing good news," David deems the sons of Rimmon doubly deserving of execution. He declares: "…I seized and killed him. How much more, then, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in bed in his own house! I will certainly avenge his blood on you, and I will

explains, "One sign of apology in the narrative has been called the technique of 'overstress.' This is where the story repeatedly states David's innocence in regard to a particular accusation. The more the author protests, the more we suspect the charge is true" (p. 45).

13. Alfons Schulz, "Narrative Art in the Books of Samuel," refers to the literary phenomenon in which two characters are treated as a unit as "the law of twins" (p. 141), a treatment illustrated by these two indistinguishable brothers.

rid the earth of you" (vv. 10b–11). He orders the assassins killed, and their mutilated corpses displayed by the pool *at Hebron*. No public mourning ensues, but the severed head of Ishbaal, David's own brother-in-law (!), is buried in the tomb of Abner *at Hebron*. It is the final prelude to David accepting the allegiance of all the tribes of Israel *at Hebron*.

This, the third instance in the first four chapters of 2 Samuel, in which David receives news of violent death in the House of Saul, presents an abbreviated royal response. He does not mourn or lament or fast. His speech merely reinforces the significance he attaches to the swift execution of those who come to him with news and evidence of murder (*unless* they are involved in a blood feud). Here David, rather than the Lord, is the avenger of wickedness, even as his words and actions underscore his innocence in relation to the violent deaths in the House of Saul. His pronouncements and behavior also showcase his commitment to justice, as well as to the sacrosanct status of kings, covenants, and the lives of righteous men. With respect to the murders that clear his pathway to the throne of all Israel, David is righteous; he is Teflon. No guilt adheres to him even as no human obstacle to his accession remains alive.[14]

Uriah's Death and the (S)word that Devours

The scandalous tale of David's idleness during the season of war and his dalliance with Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah the Hittite, marks a turning point in 2 Samuel.[15] The chapter is busy with messages sent and received—for the beautiful woman's identity, for her person, of her pregnancy, for her husband, of his own death plan, of its success, of David's nonchalance. In striking contrast to David's mournful or outraged reactions to the deaths in the House of Saul, the king's reaction to news of Uriah's death is dispassionate, even flippant. It is

14. David Gunn, "David and the Gift of the Kingdom (2 Sam 2–4, 9–20, 1 Kgs 1–2)," *Semeia* 3 (1975): 14–45. Of 2 Sam 2–4 Gunn points out, "This focuses our attention on the remarkable fact that David, despite his obvious position of power, has made absolutely no attempt to seize by force the throne of Israel." However, Gunn also notes regarding David's response to Ishbaal's assassins, "Indeed there is more than a hint of a public relations exercise in his dramatic dispatch of the bringers of the gift [of his head], just as there is in his elaborate dissociation from the killing of Abner. Does he protest too much?" (p. 16).

15. Gunn, "David and the Gift of the Kingdom," comments, "curiously the Bathsheba episode dominates the central political events of rebellion and coup that follow it" (p. 35).

conveyed in his dictated reply to Joab's messenger: "Do not be distressed about this matter, for the sword devours now one and now another; press your attack on the city and overthrow it" (11:25). David conceals his verbal thumbs-up to Joab in faux military orders and words of encouragement. The narrator then briefly alludes to Bathsheba's lamentation for her slain husband; but the king's own response is devoid of all signs of grief. Though complicit, David apparently does not have much capacity for hypocrisy.

The king's reaction to word of Uriah's death also contrasts with Joab's prediction to his messenger of how he might respond to the grim news from the front. In anticipating David's displeasure at the Israelite losses due to dubious military tactics, Joab instructs his messenger to fend off an angry response with the addendum: "Your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead too" (11:21c). Joab had foreseen David's critique of the troops' dangerous proximity to the city walls of Rabbah, and suggested that the king might remind him of the Abimelech's death at the wall of Thebez. In Joab's allusion the narrative craftily inserts a reminder of the bitter end that awaits arrogant, grasping, reckless Israelite leaders, a sobering association for David and his sons. However, Joab's messenger short-circuits any possible royal anger by inserting news of Uriah's death into his original report. He is rewarded with David's calm answer. And the reader is reminded of David's cold, calculating maneuvers to cover his sexual tracks and then to dispatch the cuckold, his loyal mighty man, when these maneuvers fail. The king's response to news that his own nasty intentions have been realized presents him to the reader in a harsh, unflattering light. Previous displays of pious grief—real or pretended—give way here to a callous indifference and feigned ignorance of the true circumstances of Uriah's death.

The Wages of Sin[16]*: Part I, A Baby's Death*

The prophet Nathan dismantles the king's charade in the succeeding chapter. With David's own hasty, outraged reaction to the prophet's parable of greed, the king is forced to confront his crimes and learn of his punishment.[17] After identifying David as "the man," and (to use the

16. I borrow this phrase from Gillian Keys's study of the theological themes in 2 Samuel, *The Wages of Sin: A Reappraisal of the Succession Narrative* (JSOTSup 221; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996).

17. As J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*. Vol. 1, *King David* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), 78, observes, "His own judicial verdict obliges David to meet death face to face."

king's own phrase) a "damnable fellow"[18] who showed no pity and deserves severe punishment, Nathan delivers an oracle of divine judgment. What David has done will blow back on him. A three-fold retribution will afflict David and his family: "the sword shall never depart from [his] house" (12:10), his wives too will be taken and given to another for all to see (vv. 11–12), and, most immediately, the child soon to be born to David as a result of his adultery shall die (v. 14). Nathan pronounces this last element of punishment—the infant's death—in the wake of David's confession: "I stand guilty before the Lord!" (v. 13a). The prophet then announces that the Lord has "remitted" David's sin and commuted his death sentence; nevertheless, divine judgment finds secondary, or displaced, fulfillment in the prophecy of the baby's death.

The narrative then concentrates on David's paternal grief. Nathan departed; an infant son was born to David and Bathsheba; and, as foretold, "the Lord afflicted the child…and it became critically ill" (v. 15). With no attention to the mother's distress, the text devotes the next section to David's intensive, penitent intercession for the unnamed infant. For a week, David kept a vigil and "entreated" God for the baby's life (v. 16a), even behaving from the servants' perspective as though he were already dead. In an approximation of ritual mourning, David prays and lies on the ground all night and fasts. As before, at the news of Abner's death, the king refuses his servants' repeated encouragement to eat. When on the seventh day the child dies, the servants are afraid to tell the king: "He might do something terrible," they say among themselves (v. 18d). Their whispers prompt David to suspect what he has feared, and the servants answer "Yes" to his question, "Is the child dead?" (v. 19).

David's behavior in response to this news is even more surprising, from his servants' perspective. When the king immediately ceases to behave in the mode of penitence or grief—he rises, bathes, anoints himself, changes into fresh clothes, worships in the House of the Lord, and then returns home, requesting a meal—his servants are mystified and ask him about his conduct. His reply has led some commentators to see David's penitent behavior as manipulative rather than genuine.[19] David's own explanation is straight-forward: he had hoped that the Lord would pity him and spare the child. But, now that the child is dead, what good is fasting? "Can I bring him back again?" David asks rhetorically. He is philosophical about the situation: "I shall go to him, but he will never come back to me" (v. 23). Then, David goes to Bathsheba to "comfort" or

18. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 299 n. 5.

19. Randall C. Bailey, *David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10–12* (JSOTSup 75; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990), 42.

"console" her. The narrative, which has lingered over one painful week, now collapses nine months into part of one verse: "…he went to her and lay with her. She bore a son and she named him Solomon…" (v. 24).

The Wages of Sin: Part II, Amnon's Death

Mourning—feigned and real—will overshadow the next several chapters, as will death—social, rumored, and literal. The birth of the divinely favored Solomon is the last happy event in David's story for the remainder of 2 Samuel, and even this event is alloyed with the sorrow and pain of his infant brother's death. Echoes of David's own behavior in the actions of his older children (and in the performance of the wise woman of Tekoa) lend an eerie note to the terrible sequence of events that begins with Amnon's incestuous desire for Tamar. As David acted on an illicit lust for Bathsheba, Amnon acts on his. As David pretended to be mad to evade going to war with Philistine forces against the Israelites, Amnon pretends to be ill to gain sexual access to his sister. As David sent for the wife of Uriah, so he accommodates Amnon's request to send Tamar to his chambers. As David wept and tore his clothes and mourned for Saul and Jonathan, his violated daughter Tamar puts dust on her head and tears her beautiful tunic as she walks home keening with grief for her shame, her social death as a victim of rape. Unlike David, however, her brother Absalom will only wait so long for the king or the Lord to exact vengeance for Amnon's crime. After two years of festering hate, Absalom plots and carries out Amnon's murder in retribution for his sister's rape. Although he shares his father's political charisma and popularity, Absalom does not hold his father's views about the sacrosanct status of "the Lord's anointed." The young man Absalom soon becomes the vehicle through which the fearsome prophecy of the devouring sword within David's house sees its initial fulfillment.

For a fifth time in 2 Samuel, ch. 13 gives extensive attention to King David's response to news of death. The pattern varies and is complicated, however, by the two stages of the news. Absalom had invited all of the king's sons to his sheep-shearing festival. He had also invited the king. When David demurred, Absalom requested the presence of the heir apparent, Amnon. When David's reluctance to let him go is overwhelmed by Absalom's persistence, David sends Amnon. As with Tamar, David is again responsible for placing one of his children in harm's way. Although the sheep-shearing festival and drunken merriment recall the backdrop of Nabal's death in 1 Sam 25, Absalom's violent plot supplants any divine vengeance against the guilty Amnon. When he is struck down by

Absalom's servants, the party is over, and all the other princes flee back toward Jerusalem. Before they arrive, David hears, and believes, the devastating rumor "that Absalom had killed all of the princes, and that not one of them had survived" (v. 30b). The king reacts in patterned grief: rending his garments and lying on the ground, a reaction emulated by all his courtiers. The knowing Jonadab, who had first concocted the plot to help Amnon act on his lust for Tamar, reassures his uncle the king that only Amnon is dead, that Absalom had been waiting for an opportunity to avenge his sister's honor. The narrator does not describe David's reaction to this information. The reader is left to wonder—Was the king relieved? Was he even more devastated by a recognition of *his* roles in facilitating both the rape and its revenge? Was he angry? Was he complicit?[20] Although this textual gap beckons, the narrative hurries ahead with news that Absalom has, like his father before him, fled and become a fugitive (v. 33b).

In a pattern of events that foreshadows David anxiously waiting for news and then learning that Absalom has been killed, the narrative describes a watchman catching sight of the returning princes as they round the bend of a mountain road. Jonadab assures the king that his assessment of the matter is indeed correct, that Amnon alone is dead. Just then, "the king's sons arrived, and raised their voices and wept; and the king and all his servants also wept very bitterly" (v. 36b). David is inconsolable. After informing the reader that Absalom has taken refuge with his mother's father, the king of Geshur, the narrator reports that David "mourned for his son day after day" (v. 38c), and then provides another notice about Absalom. Therefore, the reader is left with the clear possibility that the unnamed son for whom David mourns may be the exiled Absalom rather than the deceased Amnon.[21] Whenever this transformation of David's emotional focus takes place, the narrator directly reports in the next verse: "And the heart of the king went out, yearning for Absalom; for he was now [after three years?] consoled over the death of Amnon" (v. 39). Paternal yearning and grief will overshadow the remainder of the David's experience with Absalom.

20. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 334, notes the possibility that David might have been suspected of being involved in Amnon's murder, since the narrative goes out of its way to report David's reluctance to let him attend the event, and presents his seeming forgetfulness about Absalom's hatred for Amnon.

21. James S. Ackerman presents this possibility in his article, "Knowing Good and Evil: A Literary Analysis of the Court History in 2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2," *JBL* 109 (1990): 41–64 (46).

The Wages of Sin: Part III, Absalom's Death

The king's trouble with Absalom only multiplies when he returns from exile and finally regains access to Jerusalem, but not to his father's presence. After a long delay of two more years and Absalom's increasing bitterness and resentment, the king grants an audience to his estranged son and signals forgiveness by kissing him. Immediately, Absalom begins to use his position as a prince in good standing to woo the people's affection away from his father. The coup that Absalom had been brewing for four years startles his father, who abandons Jerusalem in a stylized pilgrimage of humility and humiliation until he takes shelter (like the ill-fated Ishbaal) at Mahanaim, east of the Jordan and just south of the River Jabbok. Before the climactic (only?) battle of Absalom's rebellion, David musters his troops and offers to go out with them. They, in turn, urge him to stay behind, safe in the city. David submits to this plan, but orders his commanders—Joab, Abishai, and Ittai—in the hearing of all his men, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom" (18:5). A more unlikely, or impractical, command in the context of a civil war is hard to imagine. The beleaguered king has presented his forces with the bewildering assignment of defeating his enemy who is also his son, while "deal[ing] gently" with him. Here, as at the outset of the Bathsheba affair, David refrains from the business of war. Instead, he stays behind in relative security, with only his obsessive thoughts to occupy him.

After yet another battle in which David does not participate (*pace* his non-involvement at Mount Gilboa and at Rabbah), another of David's (beloved) enemies lies dead. While David waits at the gate, his troops fight across the whole region, especially within the treacherous forest of Ephraim. In this forest, Absalom's mane of beautiful hair ensnares him in the branches of an oak tree and leaves him dangling, an easy target for David's men. Although an unnamed foot soldier remembers the king's injunction and recoils from killing the rebel, Joab has no patience for such nonsense. He and his armor-bearers slay Absalom and toss his remains into a forest pit. The rest of the chapter is devoted to the delicate matter of conveying these "tidings" to the king. The task falls to two messengers—the eager and fleet-footed Ahimaaz and the efficient Cushite. As with the news from the front at Rabbah, Joab is keenly aware of the impact that this intelligence will have on David. He tries to discourage Ahimaaz, the aristocratic son of Zadok, from reporting to the king with the question: "Why should you run, my boy, when you have no news worth telling?" (18:22).

Meanwhile, back at Mahanaim, David sits at the gate while a watchman paces the roof above him. The narrator describes the back-and-forth conversation between David and the watchman, as the latter tells the king of approaching runners, first one and then another.[22] Even before they arrive, David tries to deduce what intelligence they might bring. He is oddly optimistic. When Ahimaaz tells the king that his loyal troops have been victorious, David's sole question regards the fate of the young man Absalom. Ahimaaz declares no direct knowledge of his fate, and the king asks him to stand aside. The Cushite then arrives and presents his good news that the rebellion has been put down, that "the Lord has vindicated [David] today" against the rebels (v. 22). Again, David's singular concern is Absalom's safety. The Cushite's reply is a model of diplomacy and discretion: "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rose against you to do you harm fare like that young man!" (v. 23). Reminding the king that "that young man," for whom he is so concerned, was an enemy and one who meant to do the king and those loyal to him harm, the Cushite also implies, without direct statement, that the young man has met his just end—death. Taking the messenger's point, David commences his own poignant and lavish grieving.

Devastated, the king finds himself once more in the role of receiving news that someone significant—and this time, all too dear—to him has died. Unlike each of David's previous demonstrations of respect and bereavement at such news, the scene at Mahanaim presents a king whose feelings of loss are raw. No ritual gestures or poetic eloquence or funerary activities overlay or filter what is clearly a father's sense of absolute desolation. In his trembling, weeping, and repeated cries for his son, David's emotional state barely rises above a primal howl. He moves from the public, ruling space in the city gate to the isolation of an upper chamber, weeping as he goes, and saying: "My son, Absalom! My son, my son, Absalom! Would that I had died instead of you! O Absalom, my son, my son!" (19:1).[23] When word of the king's anguish reaches Joab

22. David M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (JSOTSup 6; Sheffield: JSOT, 1978), deems the account of this foot race "sheer entertainment." He highlights the fact that it is "essentially a tale of suspense which at the same time, by creating a 'build-up' to David's reaction to the news of the battle, serves to heighten the emotional impact of his response as well as the irony in the ambivalence of his attitude to the victory" (p. 45).

23. Ackerman, "Knowing Good and Evil," makes several astute observations about the death of Absalom, which he sees as evoking the binding of Isaac (Gen 22), and about his father's outcry upon hearing of it, which he sees as expressing "the wish that divine judgment would have fallen on the crime's original perpetrator rather than on the next generation of sacrificial lambs" (p. 50).

and the troops, their triumph loses its glory and a pall of sadness and shame spreads over their company. The narrator reports that the king continues to cover his face and cry for his lost son, Absalom, until Joab's brilliant and excoriating speech confronts David with his maddening penchant for "showing love for those who hate [him] and hate for those who love [him]" (v. 7). Joab's threat to abandon the undone king who has scorned his men's loyalty and can only obsess about his personal loss pierces David's fog of grief. Although he speaks not a word to Joab, or to his troops, David ceases to wail, composes himself, and returns to his seat in the city gate, where all the troops present themselves before him. He again dons the mask of the monarch, and his men are placated.

Deaths and Destiny: A Fearful Symmetry

No other biblical character receives so many reports of death as David does. No other biblical king or father has so many scenes in which his responses to tidings of death are so closely scrutinized. Adam's response to news of Abel's death is not even narrated. Jacob's mad grief over Joseph's supposed death is described, but in just three verses. The horror and sadness throughout Egypt on the occasion of the final plague is described with minimalist reserve: "there was a loud cry in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead" (Exod 12:30). Aaron is forbidden to mourn for his incinerated sons, Nadab and Abihu, in Lev 10, as the prophet Ezekiel must not mourn for his dead wife (24:15–18). The elderly Eli is more distraught over the loss of the Ark to the Philistines when the deaths of his wicked sons are reported to him (1 Sam 4). Job's sorrow for his deceased children is muted by being blended in with his response to all of his losses: "Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshipped" (2:20). Only David's reactions to news of death receive such detailed and repeated attention, and only in the Deuteronomistic History. (The Chronicler does not trouble his narrative with such unpleasant events.)

To what end, the reader might ask? When David's responses in such critical moments are considered, what do they reveal about him? In the three instances in which David learns that Saulides have died, he is magnanimous though distressed. He displays his respect in choreographed, ritual, funerary behavior: torn clothes, fasting, lamentation, burial. He impresses his people with the fact that, though convenient to him and even necessary for his accession to the throne of all Israel, these murders were not of his doing. If McCarter is right, the narrator in these scenes functions as a kind of defense lawyer or spin doctor for David vis-à-vis

the deaths of Saul, Jonathan, Abner, and Ishbaal.[24] In the matter of Uriah's death, however, David is strikingly insensitive and makes no pretense of sadness. Why should he, if he is innocent of involvement? However, the reader, who has seen the plot unfold, can only be appalled. The king's guilt quickly emerges as a matter of prophetic record; and, in the next three scenes in which David learns of someone's death, he is cast in the role of the grieving father. Within the reward–retribution logic of the DtrH, David pays for his crime(s) in a fearfully symmetrical way. And the reader is invited in close to see the wages of sin in the painful reality of the royal sinner. In an ironic realization of David's comment to the messenger from the battle at Rabbah—"the sword devours now one and now another" (11:25)—the reader must witness the sword destroying members of the king's own household and recognize, along with David, his role in charting its destructive course. By the end of Absalom's rebellion, David has earned the label he so angrily gave to the grasping rich man of Nathan's parable; he is indeed, a *ben-mawet*, a "son/man of death." Deaths have paved his pathway to the throne, and the bodies of loved ones lie strewn about as David holds onto his position at a heart-breakingly high price. By attending to David in these seven situations of personal and political crisis, by encouraging readers to witness his poise and outrage, his resilience and desolation, the Deuteronomistic History has made its main character a thoroughly compelling centerpiece worthy of its sweeping national/theological drama.

24. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 15.

DAVID AND ITTAI

Francis Landy

David Gunn was the first scholar to notice the complexity of the "Story of King David," to reject the simple classification of the narrative as pro- or anti-Davidic. In particular, he points out that David's flight from Absalom, his point of greatest weakness, is "curiously positive"; the positivity, however, results from passivity, a willingness to leave things in the hands of YHWH and others.[1] The flight is marked by a series of dramatic encounters, each one of which illustrates a different aspect of David's response to the crisis, as well as that of his followers. In this essay I will examine the first two of these encounters, the one with Ittai, the commander of David's Gathite mercenaries, the second with Zadok the priest and all the Levites (2 Sam 15:17–29). Both of these incidents exemplify the dialectic between inside and outside, but lead to opposite conclusions. Both exhibit David's rhetorical mastery, despite his weakness, his ability to manipulate feelings and loyalties; both evoke a tangle of symbolic, intertextual and ethnic complexities.

Ittai is apparently a foreigner; his Gathite contingent passes by David together with the Cherethites and Pelethites, David's non-Israelite, possibly Aegean, corps, which are omnipresent yet distinct throughout, and only in, the Davidic narratives.[2] The Cherethites and Pelethites suggest a military professionalism indicative of the transformation from tribal confederacy to expansionist monarchy, one which blurs the Israelite character of the Davidic kingdom. However, against his best interests, David urges Ittai to switch sides; Ittai refuses, and subsequently becomes one of David's three commanders in the war against Absalom.

1. David M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (JSOTSup 6; Sheffield: JSOT, 1978), 101.

2. The identity of the Cherethites and Pelethites is uncertain. Cherethites (*krty*) are often identified as Cretans (e.g. KBL, 501). Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 9; New York: Doubleday, 1984), 256, provides an extensive discussion. Pelethites (*plty*) may be constructed so as to rhyme with Cherethites or may refer to an unknown people (KBL, 936).

David's fortunes are throughout connected to Gath. He achieves prominence through defeating Goliath of Gath; he escapes from Saul to enter the service of Achish of Gath; now a Gathite swears undying loyalty to him. There is thus an exchange: Ittai and his 600 men correspond to David's 600 followers during his Gathite exile.[3] The boundaries between Israel and the Philistines are crossed and recrossed.

Gath is one of the cities of the Philistine pentapolis, and thus an archenemy of Israel. Relations between David and Gath are characterized by dissimulation, tension and distrust. Ittai's loyalty to David renders him a traitor to the Philistines, since David had liberated Israel from Philistine domination (2 Sam 5:17–25), and thereby broken faith with Achish. He might be obliged to avenge the death of Goliath. On the other hand, there is at least one indication of friendly relations between Gath and David. On its troubled journey to Jerusalem, the ark is deposited with Obed-Edom the Gathite, who is blessed in consequence (2 Sam 6:10–12). Halpern suggests that Obed-Edom was a Gathite ally of David;[4] at any rate, he is an integral part of the kingdom.

The conversation happens at the "far house" (2 Sam 15:17), the liminal point between Jerusalem and the rest of the world. The king "stops" there; one imagines him looking back at the city which he conquered and made his capital, and forwards to the uncertain future. The look is fraught with the knowledge of YHWH's justice and his son's treason. Ittai's faithfulness contrasts with Absalom's filial impiety, the people's transfer of allegiance, and the loss of divine favour. Ittai may remind David of his Gathite past, his experience of exile and estrangement, as well as the murderousness of the son he most loves. As he looks back, in time as well as space, his servants pass by. As Fokkelman says, the disorganized flight has become a march-past, an inspection of the troops.[5] The narrative focuses on David and his reactions, especially through its use of synecdoche, as the following literal translation makes clear, where "by his hand" is matched by "at his foot," and "by the face of the king": "And all his servants were passing by his hand, and all the Cerethites and the Pelethites, and all the Gathites, 600 men who came at his foot from Gath, passing by the face of the king" (2 Sam 15:17). It is in slow

3. Nadav Naʾaman, "Ittai the Gittite," *Biblische Notizen* 94 (1998): 22–35 (24), sees Ittai as a fictional construct designed to provide David with an image of his past self, just as, I will argue, the metaphor of the "pasture" does in v. 25.

4. Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 305.

5. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*. Vol. 1, *King David* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1981), 179.

motion: one sees the troops passing by, while David stands still, and their passage corresponds to the passing of his life, and the memories they bring with them, for instance of his time in Gath. Then David picks out one face in the crowd: Ittai. Presumably Ittai is an old companion from his Gath days. His name, moreover, as both Polzin and Garsiel have noted, is a pun on the words *ʾitti/iittanu*, "with me/us," and *ʾattah*, "you," both of which occur in the immediate sequence: "And the king said to Ittai the Gathite, 'Why do you go, also you, with us'" (2 Sam 15:19). This verse evokes the bond between king and captain, both through the second person address and the emphasis on their togetherness. But the name is also unmistakably non-Hebraic. It suggests, then, the link between David and the non-Israelite world, that David himself crosses ethnic boundaries, and hence, as with Cerethites and Pelethites, the transformation of the Israelite polity. Baruch Halpern has suggested that David introduced Philistine techniques and tactics, that he absorbed Philistine military and political culture.[6]

Fokkelman, as usual, analyzes David's speech as a concentric structure:

A Why are you coming with us?
  B Go back, stay with the king
    C for you are a foreigner, an exile from your own country
      X You came only yesterday, today must you be compelled to share our wanderings
    C' I go whither I go
  B' Go back home and take your countrymen with you
A' May YHWH grant you mercy and truth.

This attributes rhetorical perfection and closure to David's speech—even in adversity he remains the master of language. There is a certain validity to Fokkelman's analysis. B and B' clearly correspond quite closely, and C and C' share the theme of exile. However, Fokkelman's predilection for symmetry overlooks the roughness, strangeness, and connotative density of David's speech, and is aided by some creative translation; in addition, I cannot see any connection between A and A'.

David's speech begins with a question: "Why do you go, also you, with us?" The question perhaps expresses surprise at Ittai's inexplicable loyalty, when all Israel has transferred its fealty; only the mercenary, it

6. Alexander Rofé, "David's Kingdom: Revolution and Civil War" (Hebrew) in *David, King of Israel: Alive and Enduring?* (ed. A. Mazar, Y. Zakovitch, O. Lipschitz, and A. Rofé; Jerusalem: Simor, 1997 [Hebrew]), 203–9 n. 6, argues that David effected a transformation from an ethnic to a territorial kingdom, relying on the expertise of foreigners, both military and bureaucratic. This was the underlying cause of Absalom's revolt.

would seem, acts against his self-interest. The ironic inversion is amplified in the next line by David's urging Ittai to "return, dwell/sit with the king." As Gunn says, there is an element of parody here, since the true king is apparently acknowledging the usurper; from the point of view of the soldier-of-fortune, power is sovereignty.[7] Noteworthy is the disruption of the question by *vegam ʾattah*, "even you," a phrase Fokkelman omits. It matches "for you are a foreigner" and "also you are an exile." Three times the word for "you" is repeated, as if to insist on Ittai's foreignness, his not being at home, as well as his real presence. Furthermore, *gam*, "also, even," recurs in *vegam goleh ʾattah*, "and also you are an exile." The particle *gam* amplifies the extremity of Ittai's condition—not only is he a foreigner but also an exile—primarily, however, it is a filler word: *gam ʾattah* measures the space between *telek* ("you are going") and *ʿittanu*, ("with us"); likewise *gam* prolongs the second phrase. We can imagine David looking at Ittai, thinking about him, considering what to say.

In the second part of his speech David switches from the second person to the first—"Today should I dislodge[8] you to go with us, and I am going whither I am going?"—with its repetition of *ʾani* ("I") in "I (*ʾani*) go whither I (*ʾani*) I go." From Ittai David turns to himself: "Why do you go with us?" leads naturally to "Where am I going?" Looking at Ittai, David looks back at himself, or, rather, imagines Ittai looking at him as someone going nowhere. The double displacement—Ittai is an exile who has only just arrived ("Yesterday you came") and is now forced to go elsewhere—is compounded by the absence of a destination. There is thus a complex identification as well as dissociation between David and Ittai. Ittai only arrived yesterday, whereas David cannot escape himself and his destiny. Ittai is apparently not included even among the "we" comprising David and his servants; as Gunn says, the stranger is characterized, ostensibly, by total freedom.[9] Equally, however, the recursion from the first person plural to the first person singular suggests David is isolated within the group. He is going wherever he is going—the repetition conveys immobility as well as motion, as David watches everyone, himself in particular, passing by.

At the centre of all this movement are two imperatives offering the possibility of a way out and of an end to the wandering: *šub vʿšeb*, "return, sit/dwell," is matched in the second verse by *šub vʿhašeb*, "return, bring back." There is an obvious word-play between *šub* and

7. Gunn, *The Story of King David*, 101.
8. This is McCarter's (*II Samuel*, 364) happy translation.
9. Gunn, *The Story of King David*, 102.

šeb, and *šeb* rhymes with *hašeb*. Sitting, dwelling and retraction interfuse, to provide an opposite pole to the solitary king. This, David seems to say, is where your place is. The rhetorical attractiveness of the alternative is compounded by the apical position of the collocation in both verses, and their alliterative isolation. The word *šeb*, "sit," moreover, at least when performed in conjunction with a king, suggests being enthroned; Ittai will be Absalom's co-ruler, the power behind the throne. In the second verse, the temptation is augmented by appeal to Ittai's primary responsibility to his men: "return your brothers with you." Treachery is in fact ethical.

The last phrase of David's speech is difficult and disputed. Fokkelman and McCarter follow the LXX as reading "May YHWH grant you loyalty and truth," whereas the MT has "may loyalty and truth be with you."[10] In either case, the reference to "loyalty" (*ḥesed*) and "truth" (*ʾemet*) raises fundamental issues: where does Ittai's loyalty lie? David seems to be saying that Ittai is under no obligation, that his true loyalty is to his men, and so on. Beyond that, however, especially if YHWH is the implicit or explicit subject, there is the question of YHWH's truth and loyalty. What has happened to YHWH's promise of eternal *ḥesed*, for instance in 2 Sam 7:15? Correspondingly, where is David's true loyalty?

The concluding phrase thus breaks the frame; it is both a reassurance and a question. Other details also suggest a wider range of reference. David tells Ittai, "for you are a foreigner, an exile from your place." Why is Ittai an exile?[11] The detail that Ittai followed David from Gath implies that his personal loyalty to David supersedes that to Achish, or that he was banished. At any rate, there is a story we do not know. There may be an echo of the name "Goliath" (*golyat*), in "exile" (*goleh*), so that Ittai recollects also paronomastically Gath's vanquished hero, and thus the transformation of the enemy into the friend. Polzin remarks that for exiles in Babylon, Ittai's exile might remind them of their own.[12]

In view of Ittai's long association with David, it seems churlish that the latter says, "Yesterday you came…," in parallel to "And today should I dislodge you…" The very incongruence, however, suggests the transience

10. Seeing *ʾimk* as a Janus construction. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 365, comments that *yhwh yʿsh ʿmk* has dropped out through haplography. Other versions expand the phrase in various ways.

11. André Caquot and Philippe de Robert, *Les Livre de Samuel* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1994), 530, say that *lmqmk* must mean "to your place," and introduce the perspective of the Gathites.

12. Robert Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 159.

of all human loyalties. It is linked to David's succeeding self-reflexive statement that "I go whither I go." This may be an expression of indeterminacy; however, one possibility is clearly death, the final destination of us all. It thus recalls the wise woman of Tekoa's evocation of common human mortality in the previous chapter: "For indeed we die, like water spilled upon the ground…" (2 Sam 14:14).

On the one side, then, there is "loyalty" and "truth," key political terms which suggest constancy and transcendent values; on the other, there is the melancholy of the man who can see only death in front of him and the impermanence of all human achievements. Ittai thus gives David an opportunity to express his grief, his sense of not being worth accompanying. At the same time, he is an instrument of David's recovery.

Ittai replies: "As YHWH lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for life or for death, there shall be your servant" (2 Sam 15:21). He introduces the name of YHWH, the hidden or explicit subject of the end of David's speech, beginning where David left off. However, instead of YHWH siding with David's enemies and validating Ittai's departure, Ittai associates YHWH with David. The parallelism, "As YHWH lives, and as my lord the king lives" suggests that the king's life is intertwined with YHWH's. YHWH's immortality, as the one constant, sustains the life of the king, and will presumably support him in the crisis. That "As YHWH lives, and as my lord the king lives" is an oath further emphasizes the absoluteness of Ittai's commitment, since the oath is a guarantee of truth. David is ironically right in saying to Ittai "with you is loyalty and truth," since he, the foreigner, is the true exemplar of those qualities in the narrative.

The rest of Ittai's speech is characterized by uncertainty. Three times the conditional *ʾim*, "if," is repeated: "For wherever *ki ʾim*[13] my lord the king shall be, whether (*ʾim*) for death or (*ʾim*) for life." Ittai unpacks the enigma of David's "I go whither I go," but also exposes its unimportance. What really matters is that "there will be your servant." The speech is marked by repetition, both internally and in response to David's speech. David says that Ittai is an exile from his "place" (*limᶜqomeka*); Ittai says that his place is wherever (*bimᶜqom ʾašer šam*) David is. Thus he is not an exile, whatever vicissitudes he undergoes, and even if David's adventures lead to death. Similarly, the word "there" (*šam*) links David's location to Ittai's: "there" provides a deictic focus, a definitive convergence of Ittai's destiny with David's, to counter David's assertion that life with him would be but wandering. Even more striking is the

13. *ʾim* here is the Kethib, but is omitted in Qere.

repetition of "my lord of the king": David tells Ittai to "dwell" with the king, but from Ittai's perspective he is already accompanying him.

Ittai establishes a hierarchy, from YHWH through "my lord the king" to himself as "your servant," the very last word in the speech. He eliminates, at least formally, his own subjectivity; he is speaking only as "your servant," in the third person, subservient to David's will, his own self introduced, reluctantly and effaced, in the last word. His only role, his only subject position, is to be there, in the king's service. His biography and his motives are completely hidden from us.[14] Consequently, we continue to imagine the scene through David's eyes. To his speech, with its message of the transience of all human bonds, Ittai opposes his own faithfulness. This may be a challenge. If Ittai promises to be "there," by the king's side, the king must respond with his presence, take up the role of "my lord, the king." In the next scenes, whatever his grief, the king takes the initiative, planting the priests' sons as intelligence agents in Jerusalem, inserting Hushai to subvert Absalom's counsel. Perhaps this is the result of the encounter with Ittai. Or perhaps there is no connection, and the tableau is there simply to give us insight into the king's despair, his capacity for wonder, and, as Gunn points out, a generosity which grants Ittai freedom to leave, while all the time taking effective action.

Fokkelman notes that Ittai's insistence on following David whether for life or for death recalls that of David's remote ancestor, Ruth, who thereby brings new life to the lineage of her dead husband.[15] Like Ittai, Ruth goes into exile and, like him, accomplishes an ideal union of Israel and the nations, contrary to Deuteronomic prohibition. David carries foreignness in his genes; the ideal Israelite king is at odds with his heritage. But Ittai's loyalty also exemplifies David's capacity to elicit devotion from his natural enemies, in particular Jonathan, Michal and even Saul. David's appeal is to the marginal; throughout the story of his flight from Saul, for instance, he turns for support to displaced centres of sacred power, such as Samuel or the transplanted priestly sanctuary of Nob, and eventually Achish. Why does Ittai follow David? He may illustrate David's unaccountable attractiveness, even and especially in adversity.

There is another tradition about Ittai. In 2 Sam 23:29, paralleled by 1 Chr 11:31, Ittai appears as "the son of Ribai, from Gibeah of the

14. For instance, if Rofé is right, Ittai would have no place in Absalom's kingdom, since he is a representative of David's new political order.

15. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 182. See also Caquot and Robert, *Les Livres de Samuel*, 530, and, commenting on the particular importance of *ḥesed*, McCarter, *II Samuel*, 370.

Benjaminites," in a list of David's warriors. Here Ittai is a pure Israelite, and the anomaly of his Gathite ethnicity is eliminated. Halpern reconciles the two traditions by pointing to the Philistine garrison at Geba, whose commander Jonathan killed according to 1 Sam 13:3.[16] One could invent a romance in which the son of this commander became an ally of Jonathan's friend, David, parallel to the paronomastic recrudescence of the name of Goliath in the exile of Ittai. But Gibeah of the Benjaminites is not very different, if at all, from Gibeah of Saul or from the Gibeah that was the scene of the crime in Judg 19. Three Gibeahs in the small territory of Benjamin cannot but be associated with each other, despite its hilly nature. Ittai then comes from the tribe of Saul, that which has most to lose from the new regime. He is then an antitype to Shimei in 2 Sam 16:5–13,[17] as well as to the hopes put into the mouth of Mephibosheth by his meretricious servant Ziba, in 2 Sam 16:3.

Ittai is a one-liner; he reappears 2 Sam 18 (vv. 2 and 5) as the commander of one-third of David's army, and as the recipient, together with Joab and Abishai, of David's fateful command not to harm Absalom. We do not know how he responds; he is strictly a supernumerary. Even to his speech, David simply replies with "Go, cross over," dismissing him from his view. He may find his words too moving, or too painful a reminder of David's past, or simply has to let the march continue. However, there is one further curious detail. Ittai passes over with his men, "and the children."[18] We are suddenly aware that this is much more than a mercenary contingent; it is an immigrant community. Where there are children, there are women, families, hopes for the future. Much more is invested in this for Ittai than we had imagined.

The next character, Zadok, is not even a one liner. He and the Levites come bearing the ark of God; they set it down while all the people pass. The adventures of the ark, one of the subplots of Samuel, are apparently about to continue.[19] As Polzin remarks, the narrative re-enacts in reverse the crossing of the Jordan in Josh 3–5.[20] There the stationary ark mediates between the wilderness and the Promised Land, while the people

16. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons*, 305.

17. Another connection between Shimei and Ittai is suggested by Shimei's fatal journey to Gath to recover his fugitive servants in 1 Kgs 2:39–40.

18. Everett Fox, *Give Us a King: Samuel, Saul, and David* (New York: Schocken, 1999), 230, translates "and all the families," commenting that "*taf* often too narrowly construed."

19. As Gunn, *The Story of King* David, 67, notes as part of his general critique of Rost's thesis that the succession narrative begins in ch. 6, this is the only point at which the ark appears in the narrative of 2 Sam 9–20.

20. Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 156.

pass by; here on the departure from Jerusalem it is at the last stop before the people pass over "towards the wilderness."[21] It may be, as Polzin says, that for an exilic audience the message is that the ark cannot go with them to Babylon.[22] But the significance of David's refusal to let the ark accompany him is much more immediate. Jerusalem is to be the ark's final resting place, as part of the transition from a tribal society to a monarchy; the entry of the ark into Jerusalem in 2 Sam 6 sanctifies the capital and is a prelude to the divine blessing of the Davidic dynasty in 2 Sam 7 and David's aspiration to build a Temple. For David to permit the ark to join him in his flight would be an admission of ideological failure.

In bringing the ark, Zadok and his Levites are reverting to an earlier paradigm, in which the mobile ark accompanies the people and leads them to victory.[23] They are demonstrating their allegiance to David; the people, in seeing the ark, experiences the presence of God in their midst. If, in v. 18, focalization is on the king as he watches the people passing, here it is on the people as they look on the ark. The ark, as the centre of the moving people, represents the covenant of God, either with the people or with David.

The priests side with David, instead of awaiting developments, perhaps because their interests are bound up with his survival. If Rofé is right, the Jerusalem establishment is profoundly at odds with decentralized Israelite tradition. Absalom, in making Hebron his power base, is appealing to an older locus of sacrality as well as society. It could be that the priests have misconceived the appropriate course of action, from the Davidic point of view, or that their apparently anachronistic gesture is a canny political move. The ark both goes with David and stays at home, ensuring his continued subversive presence in Jerusalem.

Moreover, Zadok is David's man.[24] He appears previously in 2 Sam 8:17, together with Ahimelek son of Abiathar[25] and the king's sons, as

21. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 365, reads "the Olive Way in the wilderness," following the LXX, of which he thinks MT is a corruption.

22. Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 159. But who says it is an exilic audience? Even if the composition is from the Persian period, it would be likely to be written in Jerusalem, with a Yehudite readership.

23. Cf. Num 10:35–36, and the inaugural conquest of Jericho in Josh 6.

24. So Halpern, *David's Secret Demons*, 285 n. 6.

25. In 2 Sam 20:25, more conventionally, Abiathar is Zadok's co-priest, with the curious addition of Ira the Yaarite in v. 26. Ahimelek is also Abiathar's father. The phenomenon of multiple transgenerational duplication of names in priestly families is evidenced in 1 Chr 5:34–38, as well as the reappearance of the name of Phinehas in Eli's miscreant son.

his priests. As the son of Ahitub, he is Abiathar's uncle. How he came to survive the massacre of priests at Nob, and why he always has priority over Abiathar, the one survivor according to 1 Sam 22:20, is entirely obscure. Rivalry between Zadok and Abiathar will culminate in the latter's banishment in 1 Kgs 2:26–27; there, indeed, Zadok displaces Abiathar. The authorial note in 1 Kgs 2:27 that Abiathar's dismissal fulfilled YHWH's judgment against the house of Eli contradicts, moreover, Zadok's apparent descent from that very house.[26]

Here the incipient tension between Zadok and Abiathar is manifest in the separation of Abiathar from the mass of Levites: "Zadok and all the Levites with him were bearing the ark…and Abiathar went up…"[27] David only addresses Zadok, though the second person plural address in v. 28 would suggest that Abiathar may be included with him.

Abiathar was David's priest during his troubles, bearing the ephod which accounted in part for his escape (1 Sam 23:6–12). It is thus strange that he should be supplanted by Zadok, if only partially. That may be the point: Zadok represents the new order. Polzin, commenting on 2 Sam 8:17–18, notes that the priests are now royal officials, and hence signify the appropriation of the sacred by the king, just as the wandering sanctuary is accommodated next to the royal house. Abiathar accordingly evokes a potential threat of sacerdotal independence. For the moment, in the transitional period leading up to Solomon, the two hieratic regimes coexist uneasily, their ideal complementarity enacted in the cooperation or friendship of the priests' sons.[28]

All the people are weeping (v. 23); Polzin remarks on the ritualistic quality of the language, as evidenced by the durative participle clauses, and the marked parallelism, which he sees as part of the "stylistic façade" of the chapter, its effort to communicate realism through language that is

26. Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 196, solves the problem by assuming that these are different Ahitubs.

27. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 455, argues that *yaʿal* is an ellipsis for "and he offered up burnt offerings": while Zadok and the other Levites were carrying the ark, Abiathar was sacrificing. This is a useful division of functions. Caquot and Robert, *Les Livres de Samuel*, 531, follow Rashi in suggesting that "and Abiathar went up" has been displaced from the beginning of the verse.

28. Saul Olyan, "Zadok's Origins and the Tribal Politics of David," *JBL* 101 (1982): 177–93, follows Cross in postulating a Judahite origin for Zadok, complementing Abiathar as a representative of the northern Shilonite sanctuary. For a full discussion, see Gary Knoppers, *I Chronicles 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 12; New York: Doubleday, 2003), 404–5.

highly artificial. The participles, he suggests, communicate a sense of immediacy, and draw the reader into the action.[29] Fokkelman, likewise, notes their expressiveness:

> And the whole land was weeping with a great voice
> And all the people were crossing over
> And the king was crossing the brook Qidron
> And all the people were crossing over towards the wilderness.[30]

Fokkelman suggests that "the whole land" is different from "all the people" and refers to the onlookers from the countryside, as opposed to David's troops.[31] Be that as it may, "land" and "people" are complementary terms; one can imagine the land sympathetically participating in the king's departure and thus already anticipate the outcome, since in the Hebrew Bible the land is implicated in the fortunes of its inhabitants. Whatever his success, Absalom will be an alien, a usurper, ironically so if, as in Rofé's view, he appeals to Israelite irredentism.

There is thus a concentric structure, at the centre of which is the king: we move from the land to the people to the king, and thence visualize the people and the landscape. Once again the king is isolated in the midst of the people, the object of an intense gaze. Like "the far house" in v. 17, the brook or valley of the Qidron is a liminal point, marking the beginning of the wilderness. Fokkelman suggests a connection with the root *q-d-r*, meaning "darken," and that in any case the descent to the Qidron is the "nadir" of David's exodus. Rivers are pervasive boundary markers; if, at the last house, he looks back to Jerusalem, here he crosses over into a new narrative or symbolic domain, fraught with consequences for life or death.

Here he meets and parts with the ark. The scene is like a funeral, with the people weeping. The king at the centre is either the chief mourner or the corpse; in the following episode, in which king and people ascend the Mount of Olives bare-headed and unshod, the ritual mourning becomes more explicit. The ark too is at the centre of attention, and raises the question of the place of YHWH in all this lamentation.

David, at any rate, is quite clear. He makes two speeches to Zadok—one, as Fokkelman says, "fundamental," the other practical.[32] In the former, in particular, ritualized language is evident:

29. Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 153.
30. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 183.
31. Ibid., 184. Fox, *Give Us a King*, 230, translates "Now the entire region."
32. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 186.

> Return the ark of God to the city:
> If I find favour in the eyes of YHWH,
> And he restores me and lets me see him and his pasture;
> But if thus he says: "I do not desire you,"
> Here I am, let him do to me as is good in his eyes. (vv. 25–26)

Once again David bids his interlocutor to return to the city. However, instead of the wondering why the stranger is accompanying him, his question is of himself and YHWH. Fokkelman remarks that the speech is enclosed by references to the eyes of YHWH: "If I find favour in the eyes of YHWH…as is good in his eyes."[33] Focalization is thus transferred from the king to YHWH; for the first time in the sequence it has shifted. David imagines the eyes of YHWH looking at him. "If I find favour in the eyes of X" is a formulaic expression of submission, dependence and hope; similarly, "as is good in his eyes" is a euphemism for death, which suggests a subordination of personal misfortune to the divine will.

The speech is poetically intricate. Fokkelman notes the parallelism of "Return the ark of God to the city" and "And he restores me and lets me see him and his pasture," in which every component matches every other, complemented by the phonological coupling of "ark" (*ʾaron*) and "lets me see" (*hirʾani*). "If I find favour in the eyes of YHWH" similarly is antithetical to "And if thus he says, 'I do not desire you,'" and "Here I am, let him do to me" corresponds to "lets me see him." Alternate lines thus parallel each other (A-B-A-B-A-B). Equally, there are interconnections between contiguous lines, like "finding favour in the eyes of YHWH" and "lets me see him," as well as in the outer frame.

Poetic intricacy suggests rhetorical and ideational complexity. In his extremity, David produces artful discourse, whose object must be both himself and his audience, in contrast to the jaggedness, uncertainties and prolixities of that to Ittai. As in Ittai's response, the apposition of conditionals, "if," expresses commitment, an allegiance transcending contingency or divinely appointed destiny. Like Ittai, he introduces YHWH into the discourse, contrasting markedly with Absalom's cynical deployment of his name in 2 Sam 15:7–8. Ittai associates the life of YHWH with that of the king; David turns to the intimate relationship of himself and YHWH. The favour he finds in God's eyes will be manifested in his vision; focalization thus switches without transition from God to himself. Even more dramatically, in the second half of the speech he puts himself in the subject position of God, saying, "I do not like you," followed immediately by the affirmation of his presence, "Here I am," and the courage of his stand, "let him do to me as is good in his eyes."

33. Ibid., 181.

Sacral and political subordination, expressed ritually by "if I find favour in the eyes of YHWH," is reciprocated by mystical insight or adoration. In the outer frame, the reference to God's eyes surrounds the speech with an acknowledgment of an ultimate horizon in which historical events, such as Absalom's revolt, and human emotions, like those of the weepers, are contained and judged. At the centre of the concentric circles constituted by land, people and priests, the king is in communion with or separated from God. Separation would be an exile as or more drastic than that from Jerusalem. Either vision passes between himself and God, or lack of divine favour will incur an inability to see him. Similarly, in v. 26 the grounds for his assent to his rejection are, paradoxically, his identification with God. David, then, is in the position of the poet-pilgrim of Pss 42 or 84, who longs for God, the source of his life.

One can imagine this speech being addressed rhetorically to the priests, to YHWH, to David himself, and to the bystanders, and, in particular, to us as readers. It persuades the priests that David is a master of liturgical language, that his heart will be with them in Jerusalem; similarly, it would be a churlish God indeed who could resist the appeal to his intimacy. The God who listens to David speaking for a putative God who rejects him will have to deal with David's embarrassing devotion. The bystanders, and even more the readers, are likely to be impressed by David's skill at political and sacred theatre. Gunn, for instance, comments on the comic touch which allows David not "to grasp or cling" to the kingdom, and which grants him "some of his best moments."[34] And one can imagine himself as his first audience, conscious of how well he is performing.

However, it is not theatre, pure and simple, or rather the dramatic flair—David's knack for finding the right word—is a manifestation of his thought, which works at several levels. Jonathan Z. Smith likes to quote Levi-Strauss's comment that "man has always been thinking equally well."[35] The elaborate poetic form suggests that the discourse is a rendition of a complex message, indicating the king's state of mind, and a process of "working through," an attempt to find aesthetic, emotional and intellectual articulation of intolerable grief. David's traumatic dispossession of his son and his kingdom leads to a reconsideration of his primary relationships, those with God and with himself.

34. Gunn, *The Story of King David*, 101–2.

35. Jonathan Z. Smith, "When the Chips Are Down," in *Relating Religion: Essays on the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1–60 (31). The quotation is from Claude Lévi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," in *Structural Anthropology*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1963), 206–31 (230).

Disjunctions, word plays—such as that between *ʾaron* and *hirʾani*—and metaphors indicate thought processes, associative transitions, and a supplementarity that exceeds the immediate rhetorical context. In particular, the metaphor *nawehu*, "his pasture," is an apparently bizarre designation for Jerusalem or the Temple.[36] I confess that it was this metaphor that drew me to this passage, and is my chief motivation in writing this essay.

The word *n-w-h* only occurs once before in the Davidic narratives, in 2 Sam 7:8, at the beginning of Nathan's speech to David concerning the building of the Temple. YHWH says to David, "I took you from the pasture (*hnwh*), from behind the flock." The word thus reminds David of his beginnings, before his ascent to power and its associated travails, and of his election through Samuel.

Is it the city[37] or the sanctuary that is the pasture, or the Temple David never builds and which is the subject of so much divine ambivalence? The Temple is associated throughout with Edenic imagery, with tranquility and with fruitfulness. In the Song of the Sea in Exod 15, for instance, "your sacred pasture" (*nwh qdšk*) to which the Israelites are led in v. 13 parallels the "mountain of your inheritance" in which they are planted in v. 17. In Isaiah, in particular, pastoral imagery characterizes eschatological transformation, for instance in ch. 11. In 32:18, the "peaceful pasture" (*nwh šlm*) in which the people dwell contrasts with the indolent women (*nšm šʾnnt*) who are the subjects of the first part of the oracle (32:9).[38] In thinking of the city or the sanctuary as a pasture, David draws upon the metaphor of YHWH as divine shepherd, whose flock is Israel, and concomitantly upon the city or sanctuary as the source of life and blessing for YHWH. It is a refuge, contrasted with the wilderness whither David is going. But it is also contrasted with the city itself. Jerusalem or the sanctuary in its midst is an antithesis of the city, of which the principal exemplar in Judean writings is Jerusalem itself.

David, in evoking the "pasture," is looking back over his life, and questions it for its value. The David who is taken from the pasture in his imagination goes back to it, to an idyll before he entered history and

36. For this reason, Caquot and Robert, *Les Livres de Samuel*, 531, think it has the late meaning of "abode" here. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 371, follows Cross in holding that it is a designation for a tent shrine. But the pastoral connotations are obvious from a brief glance at references in the Prophets and Psalms (e.g. Ps 23:2).

37. In contrast to McCarter, Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 186, assumes, on the basis of the parallelism, that the reference is to Jerusalem, but there is no way of telling.

38. The contrast is underlined by the recurrence of the word *šʾnn* at the end of the verse, in the phrase "untroubled places of repose."

politics. He implicitly shares in the divine resistance to Temple and monarchy, as expressed, for instance, in 2 Sam 7, and in the point of view of the traditionalists, the party of Absalom and Abiathar, if one accepts Rofé's analysis. In that case, the elder David looks back to the young one, experience to innocence, across the divide marked especially by the sin with Bathsheba and Uriah. Thus, the question is that of the continuity and discontinuity of David's life. As he flees from Jerusalem, amid the ruins of the kingdom and filial betrayal, he encounters shadows of the past, who raise fundamental questions, of what his life means and whether he is the same person. But it is also a question of God, who chose him from the sheepfold and launched him on his career as Saul's nemesis.[39] It is consequently a question of history, or at least of this history. As David progresses, descending to the Jordan, it becomes clear that the primordial sin is not that with Bathsheba and Uriah, but against Saul and his house.[40] First Ziba, mendaciously, and then Shimei, interpret it thus. David is a symbolic parricide, who drives his adoptive father, Saul, to his death.[41] Absalom thus enacts Oedipal revenge.

The word *n-w-h* evokes both the poetic idiom, as a fancy designation for Jerusalem or the sanctuary, and the tradition of pastoral poetry. David comes to prominence as a shepherd who is also a musician. In wishing to return to YHWH's "meadow," David not only nostalgically recollects his past, but a certain mental or imaginative condition. There may be an implicit promise or temptation, both to the priests and to YHWH, that his return will add to the poetic anthology. Poetry is that which might redeem politics. David, as the master of language and of music, is aligned with but also in opposition to David the pragmatist, who ensures that his agents remain in Jerusalem.

There is another master of language and music here: the narrator. In taking the stance of an objective reporter, the eyewitness façade of which Polzin speaks, the narrator implicitly identifies his voice with that of the characters and, more important, of events.[42] David and the narrator articulate the choreography of the drama. David is both a participant and an interpreter, as indeed are others, such as Shimei. The narrative conforms

39. On this, see especially David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul* (JSOTSup 14; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1981).

40. The relationship of our narrative to that of the execution of Saul's descendants in 2 Sam 21 is indeterminate. However, if the latter were to precede Absalom's revolt, it would give Shimei additional grounds.

41. For David's recognition of Saul as "my father," see 1 Sam 24:12. Saul frequently calls David "my son."

42. Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 153.

to a pattern, it seduces with its hope for sacred order and the desire that matters will turn out well. In adversity, as many critics point out, David seems to go back to his old self and to his charmed life, a charm that consists of being in tune with the narrative rhythm, of timing, and, fundamentally, of God being "with him," just as Ittai is.[43] Of course, the narrative sets up our expectations in order to disappoint them. With the death of Absalom there will be no peaceful homecoming to the divine pasture. Then the question is how genuine is David's acceptance of the divine decree. We do not know.

Ittai, I have suggested, is a stray refiguration of Goliath, an exile (*g-l-h*) from his place, which is now the land of death. Goliath brings with him the memory of David's spectacular entry into politics and heroism. As a giant-killer, David fulfils an Oedipal fantasy and displaces Saul; indeed, Goliath is a stand-in for Saul. There was a time before Goliath, before David was chosen. We remember that he was the child who was forgotten, the supernumerary child (1 Sam 16:10–11).

In vv. 27–28 David continues:

> Do you see? Return to the city in peace, and Ahimaaz your son and Jonathan son of Abiathar, your two sons, with you. Look, I will delay at the crossing of the wilderness, until word comes from you to tell me.

As Fokkelman says, there is a word to the wise here.[44] We need not assume that any spies of Absalom are around, but David does not need to spell out his intentions. The word *r-ʿ-h*, "see," recalls the eyes of YHWH in v. 25 and David's aspiration to "see" God and his pasture. We move from the mystic communion of David and God and God's ultimate purview to the light of day and human forethought. The speech oscillates between singular and plural, between including and excluding Abiathar in the discourse. It also includes two new characters, Ahimaaz and Jonathan, both of whom will have a role in the subsequent story.

Ahimaaz is conventional, at least in name. Priests throughout have relational prefixes: Ahimaaz corresponds to Ahimelek, Ahitub, and Abiathar. The two exceptions are Zadok himself and Jonathan. Zadok, through his distinctive name and his introduction in the narrative without a patronymic, reveals his intrusion as a parvenu. It may be that his name has allegorical significance, as Polzin suggests,[45] or that it is associated with Jerusalem, as the "city of righteousness" (Isa 1:21). Absalom, in

43. See, for example, Gunn, *The Story of King David*, 101–2.
44. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 183.
45. Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 153.

15:4, claims that he will give justice to every one, using the same root *ṣ-d-q*;[46] here, however, it sides with David.

Jonathan is the namesake of Saul's son and thus another reminiscence of the fall of Saul's house and its displacement by David himself. As the son of Abiathar, he is in a symmetrical position to Jonathan, representing the old, doomed, priestly order. Yet he is also innocent, like Jonathan, exculpated, for instance, from Abiathar's support for Adonijah in the struggle for the succession to David. David Jobling argues that Jonathan mediates between the two houses and "legitimates" the Davidic dynasty.[47] Our narrative is preoccupied with David's debt to Jonathan and the issue of his faithfulness to him. A similar tension is evident perhaps in the slide from second person singular to plural address in vv. 27–28. At first David speaks to Zadok alone; "your sons," however, is in the plural, as is "see," in v. 28. Abiathar, and Jonathan with him, is both included in the collectivity of priests under Zadok's authority, and excluded from it.

Jonathan is another recollection of David's past, of an ideal friendship between the two houses. His death exemplifies the cost of the narrative, and anticipates the death of Absalom. Jonathan is a "beautiful loser," like Asahel in 2 Sam 2:23, and Jonathan son of Abiathar himself, in a text in which loss stands for innocence and survival for the price of experience. However, for David Jonathan is simply an agent, a means of communication between Hushai and the priests in Jerusalem and himself. If the Saulide Jonathan sides with David against his father, his successor works to separate Absalom and David, and to prevent parricide. In the subsequent narrative both Ahimaaz and Jonathan continue to act as messengers. Ahimaaz's function as the representative of the triumphal priestly house is confirmed, paradoxically, by his refraining from delivering the bad news of Absalom's death, while Jonathan brings the report of Solomon's coronation, and thus the eclipse of his line.

Another Jonathan is David's nephew, who kills a Gathite giant in 2 Sam 21:21.[48] A couple of verses previously, Goliath is killed by

46. As Polzin notes, ibid., 151, the root is extremely rare in the Deuteronomistic History, and only occurs here in 2 Samuel.

47. David Jobling, *The Sense of Biblical Narrative: Three Structural Analyses in the Old Testament* (JSOTSup 7; Sheffield: JSOT, 1978), and *I Samuel* (Collegeville, Minn.: Berit Olam, 1998).

48. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*. Vol. 4, *Vow and Desire* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 298 n. 32, suggests that *ʾiš mdn* (2 Sam 21:20) means "man of strife," perhaps with the meaning of "champion." McCarter, *II Samuel*, 449, however, thinks that the original reading was *ʾiš mdh*, "a man of stature," as in 1 Chr 20:6. It seems probable to me that the two meanings intersect, as indeed they do in the description of Goliath.

another Davidic warrior, and David himself is saved from another giant by Abishai (2 Sam 21:17). In this narrative David is no giant-killer. The four giants from Gath correspond to the Anakite giants from Hebron in Num 13:22, Josh 15:14, and Judg 1:10.[49] Their designation as Raphaites makes them into archaic indigenous inhabitants, as well as alien Philistines; they combine autochthony with unfamiliarity. Similarly, as we have seen, the fall of Saul's house is initiated by Jonathan's patriotic killing of the Philistine commander of Geba, who may be Ittai's father.

Zadok and Abiathar return the ark to Jerusalem, and disappear from our view. They do not respond to David's words, and are not characterized in any way. The textual presence of Jonathan is a marker of the qualities of loyalty and truth exemplified by Ittai. Whether David takes any notice of the name and its implications we do not know. It is apparently as common as the toponym Gibeah in Benjamin. For the reader, however, it both points ahead, to the question of Mephibosheth's loyalty and truth and David's commitment to the house of Saul, and back, to the victims of the narrative, one of whom is David himself.

We have followed David down to the valley of the Qidron and looked at the ritual and symbolic values of his encounters and words. I have tried to show that the physical descent is accompanied by an emotional and imaginative descent, in which David finds representatives of the past, and questions them and himself about their and his ultimate value and purpose. It expresses a desire, to go back to the meadow as well as to God's house, to a point of contemplation and of poetic communion, and the impossibility of fulfilling that desire except through an action that countermands or postpones it. Above all, it concerns David's primary relationships, with God, with Jonathan, with various paternal figures, and with himself. To whom does he belong? To whom does he, and do we, owe allegiance?

The priests, in bearing the ark, evoke the crossing of the Jordan and the narrative of the entrance to the Promised Land. Similarly, the narrow escape of Ahimaaz and Jonathan in 2 Sam 17:17–21 recalls that of Joshua's spies in Jericho in Josh 2. David refuses the implications: the

49. There are only three Anakim; however, their ancestor is named ʾArba, "Four", suggesting numerical symmetry. In an earlier study, "Judges 1: The City of Writing, the Sacred, and the Fragmentation of the Body," in *Voyages in Uncharted Waters: Essays on the Theory and Practice of Biblical Interpretation in Honor of David Jobling* (ed. W. J. Bergen and A. Siedlecki; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 37–50 (41–43), I discuss the motif of quaternity in the story of the giants of Kiryat Arba. Ilana Pardes, *The Biography of Ancient Israel: National Narratives in the Bible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 114, thinks that they are "a distorted image of the patriarchs."

ark has to go back to Jerusalem and await David's homecoming and the divine decision. If Joshua's spies open the way to the land, through the symbolically named prostitute Rahab, David's spies both permit his escape back across the Jordan, and facilitate his return. They do so, however, literally undercover, hidden in the house of a woman at Bahurim, the home of the maledictor Shimei.[50] Shimei's words are subverted by a female, perhaps maternal, presence in his own domicile.

Relations between the houses of Saul and David, and between Gath and Israel, criss-cross. We find the same names and the same stories. There may be a trace here of historical processes, the ever incomplete work of appropriation and transformation of the past. David accumulates for himself immense symbolic capital; this may be experienced, and interpreted, as loss, the royal self, and Israel, constructed in exile from itself. Rhetoric, the way, for instance, that David attempts to control the responses of the priests and God, to shape his speech artistically, succeeds because of its articulation of primary feelings and values. This is, of course, literature of the highest sophistication. Is it therefore not history? Halpern and Rofé make good cases for the actual metamorphosis wrought by the monarchy. On the other hand, the sheer over-determination of detail, as of variant accounts, ensures that we are dealing with more than historical contingency. Where the narrative is to be situated (pre-, post-, exilic etc.), what its relation is to material and political circumstances, how it rakes over the ashes of the past, are questions our friend David Gunn has mulled over as much as any, in particular to forestall simple answers.

50. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 228, discusses the inversion in the two Bahurim scenes. The name Shimei is replicated in that of David's brother, father of the giant-slaying Jonathan, in 2 Sam 21:21, at least according to the Kethib. Jonathan's brother, Jonadab, instigated the sequence of events leading to Absalom's death, according to 2 Sam 13:3. Jonathan and Jonadab are identified in the Peshitta and some manuscripts of the Septuagint (see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 449). In any case, Jonathan and Jonadab seem to be variants of the same name.

A Feast Fit for a King: Food and Drink in the Abigail Story

Mary Shields

The film *Godfather II* shows the beginnings of Corleone's (the Godfather's) journey toward becoming the head of a major Mafia organization. He began by receiving small amounts of protection money and goods from various business owners and others who were much more afraid of the then-current extortionists than of him. David, the outlaw, is in precisely such a situation at the beginning of 1 Sam 25. Just as in *Godfather II*, David couches his request for protection money in positive terms that actually carry a thinly veiled threat. The narrative begins with the situation which attracts David's attention: a very wealthy landowner from Maon, who is shearing his sheep on Mount Carmel (v. 2). His name is Nabal, literally "fool," and we are told that he is churlish and does evil deeds. The narrator also throws in at the end that he happens to be a Calebite,[1] and thus part of the larger tribe of Judah. In the middle of this characterization, we are also introduced to the main character of the narrative,[2] Abigail, his wife, who is described as a woman of good insight, and, incidentally, beautiful form (or is this not so incidental, given David's future penchant for beautiful women?).[3] Their very characterizations foreshadow what is to come.

1. Reading with the Qere.

2. Contra Adele Berlin, who characterizes Abigail as a "type" rather than a well-rounded character (or "agent" in her terms). See Adele Berlin, "Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David's Wives," *JSOT* 23 (1982): 69–85 (77–78). Several more recent scholars see Abigail as a central character in her own right, most notably Bruce Birch, "The First and Second Books of Samuel," in *NIB*, 2:1171.

3. David Jobling, *1 Samuel* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1998), 153, says this characterization introduces a sexual tone to the narrative. Contrast this view with that of Alice Bach ("The Pleasure of Her Text," in *The Pleasure of Her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts* [ed. A. Bach; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990], 25–44), who sees no sexuality in this narrative at all. The reality is somewhere in between. Her beauty, especially in light of the larger

The first scene opens with the report coming to David that Nabal is shearing his sheep. David sends ten men to ask for food. The ground for the request, which is couched in very polite terms, is that David's men have protected Nabal's men and flocks, and are now asking for payment in kind. The request itself, in 1 Sam 25:6–8, is couched in apparently positive terms:

> Shalom [peace] be to you, to your house and all that is yours. I have heard that you are now shearing your sheep. Your shepherds were with us. We did not harm them, nor did anything go missing the entire time we were in Carmel. Ask your youths and they will tell you. So, may you deal graciously with these young men, for we have come on a day of feasting. Please give to your servants and to David whatever you find in your hand.

David is effectively running a protection racket.[4] Here he opens up negotiations[5] for payment for services rendered which Nabal had never requested.

First Samuel 25 is located in the midst of David's fugitive period. Just four chapters earlier we find David fleeing from Saul, eventually escaping (after feigning madness at Gath to save his own life) to a cave where

story, may well excite David's sexual interest—and he *does* act swiftly upon Nabal's death to make her his wife (although that could be as much due to his wanting her power and wealth under his control as to any attraction he may have for her, or due to his desire to consolidate his powerbase in the territory in which she lives). There are, however, a few other places in the story which could be read as sexual innuendo. See, for example, Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn's discussion of v. 41 (Abigail's statement about washing the feet "of the servants of my lord") in their *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 156.

4. Contra Yair Amit, "'The Glory of Israel Does Not Deceive or Change His Mind': On the Reliability of Narrator and Speakers in Biblical Narrative," *Prooftexts* 12 (1992): 201–12 (205); see also Birch, "The First and Second Books of Samuel," 1166. Another option is provided by Gary Stansell, "Honor and Shame in the David Narratives," in *"Was ist der Mensch..?": Beiträge zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments* (ed. F. Crüsemann, C. Harmeier, and R. Kessler; Munich: Kaiser, 1992), 94–114 (101–5), who sees in this episode David's challenge to Nabal's honor and Nabal's return challenge and response. While I need quite a bit more evidence to be convinced of his reading, which is based on an article regarding the Dinah story in Gen 34, and Bedouin practices, which may or not be parallel to practices in this time, and translates a whole host of different words as "shame," it is still a provocative and insightful glimpse into a portion of the power politics being played out in this text.

5. D. J. Wiseman, "'Is it Peace?'—Covenant and Diplomacy," *VT* 32 (1982): 311–26 (318–19, 323–24). See also Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, "The Law of the Heart: The Death of a Fool (1 Samuel 25)," *JBL* 120 (2001): 401–27 (417).

his clan ("his brothers and his entire father's house") joins him (22:1). He gathers to himself all those who were oppressed, in debt, or discontented (22:2), forming a group of about 400 men. By ch. 23, he has about 600 men following him (23:13), and by 25:1, he has moved several times, including a stay in the wilderness of Maon, from which Nabal comes (23:24–29). This chapter is also an interlude set in the center of two accounts of David sparing Saul's life. In this chapter, however, we see a very different picture of David than that portrayed in the surrounding chapters.[6] Although David spares Saul's life in the sandwich chapters (chs. 24 and 26), in this chapter he embarks on murderous revenge. Given the make-up of David's army, and the way the story is introduced (David, a fugitive moving from place to place, and this wealthy landowner, whose goods are ripe for the taking), this is hardly a simple request for hospitality.

More complex than it at first appears, the story in 1 Sam 25 is both humorous and disturbing, at times raising more questions than it answers. Reading it through twin lenses of food and drink and its resonances with wisdom can open the story up in provocative ways, yielding new insights. The very name of Nabal, "fool," and Abigail's characterization as a woman of "good insight" (v. 3) provide the invitation for a reading in terms of wisdom. In fact, Waldemar Janzen sees this story as an ethical "wisdom model story."[7] Silvia Schroer tucks a small but delightful chapter on the Abigail story into her larger book on wisdom and wisdom themes in the Hebrew Bible.[8] What has not yet been done is to read Abigail's actions and speech through the lens of Woman Wisdom in Prov 1–9. The present study will attend to that gap, by doing a close

6. Barbara Green has written a fascinating and insightful article suggesting that 1 Sam 25 represents a kind of dream scene in which we view the path not taken by David in chs. 24 and 26; see Barbara Green, "Enacting Imaginatively the Unthinkable: 1 Samuel 25 and the Story of Saul," *BibInt* 11 (2003): 1–23. Other scholars represent two main views of this text: one group sees Nabal as a figure for Saul, and another sees Nabal as being a separate character altogether. Levenson suggests that Nabal is either a false name for a Calebite clan leader, or a name that may have connotations with dogs, meaning he is "dog-like"; see Jon D. Levenson, "1 Samuel 25 as Literature and History," *CBQ* 40 (1978): 11–28 (14); cf. LXX. See also Jon D. Levenson and Baruch Halpern, "The Political Import of David's Marriages," *JBL* 99 (1980): 507–18.

7. Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 14–15.

8. Sylvia Schroer, "Abigail: A Wise Woman Works for Peace," in *Wisdom Has Built Her House: Studies on the Figure of Sophia in the Bible* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2000), 78–83.

reading of the story itself using the two lenses of Wisdom and food and drink. Framed by food and drink, the story pivots on David's "request" for food from the "fool," Nabal.

A request (or demand?) for food is the pivot on which this story turns. Food here is multivalent. First, it is the occasion for feasting both for David (David says it is a feast day in v. 8) and for the shearers (Abigail has the provisions all ready to hand, including five dressed sheep, v. 18; cf. v. 11). It is also a form of payment—payment for the shepherds who have watched the sheep, the shearers who are shearing the sheep, and now for David's men, who David says have also guarded the sheep, not to mention the shepherds themselves. Finally, although David's request is couched as a thinly veiled demand, it nevertheless invokes hospitality customs, which would dictate that a wealthy landowner share his goods with those in need.[9] Of course, we are here dealing with a more loaded and volatile situation of a roving army needing provisions. Nevertheless, the customs of hospitality dictate giving food to those who ask, even if only for the protection of the landowner, and maybe even more particularly for a fellow Judean. Food is therefore also the instrument of hospitality (or lack thereof) in this story.

What is interesting at this point is that after David's men deliver his request, the text says "they waited" (v. 9). For what are they waiting? Are they expecting a positive or negative reply? Are they expecting to take the food back with them? Is this more like a parley, the opening of a longer negotiation process? We are never to know, for Nabal's response lives up to his name and characterization. In v. 10, Nabal rejects the "request" out of hand, adding insult to injury:

> Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? Today there are many slaves who are breaking away from their master. Now will I take my bread, my water, and my animals which I have slaughtered for my shearers and give to men whom I do not know? What's the sense of this?

Nabal's reply is insulting and malicious on several levels. First, it is clear from his second rhetorical question, "who is the son of Jesse?," that he knows perfectly well who David is (he's Jesse's son!), and is casting a slur on his lineage. Second, he characterizes David as a slave breaking away from his master (i.e. "Kind Saul"), another aspersion, which at best

9. If David was approaching as a *ger*, a sojourner, he was entitled to hospitality (cf. Exod 22:21; 23:9; Deut 1:16; 24:17). See also T. R. Hobbs, "Hospitality in the First Testament and the 'Teleological Fallacy,'" *JSOT* 95 (2001): 3–30 (26), who argues that here we are not dealing simply with rules for the *ger*, but with a situation in which a fellow Judean is asking for reciprocal treatment. According to Hobbs, "such reciprocity was normal."

suggests that David is merely a rabble rouser, and at worst, accuses him of treason. In its larger context, as Jon Levenson and Baruch Halpern have noted, David has broken away from his master by two means, first by fleeing from Saul's court, and second, by gathering around him "all manner of bad debtors."[10] In their view, this request represents a third means of breaking away: "a challenge to Nabal's political authority," which may in turn be violating David's standing as a vassal to his ruler.[11]

Verse 12 reports the youths turning back and reporting Nabal's response to David. The Hebrew word used here means a hostile turning, thus foreshadowing what is to come. In v. 13, David acts immediately, instructing his men to gear up for battle and doing so himself. Then he starts for Nabal's land with 400 of his men, leaving 200 with the baggage. In the meantime, Abigail is told by "one of the young men" what has transpired. Moreover, this messenger gives David a good report (his group really *did* protect us and keep us from harm, says the messenger). He urges Abigail to take action to save the household, "for evil has been plotted against our master and all his house" (v. 17). Note too, that the servant adds to Nabal's negative characterization, "for he is so worthless (*bn-bly'l*) that no one can speak to him." It is also meaningful that the servant turns to Abigail, the woman of good insight (v. 3), for help. The servant follows the way of Wisdom in asking the wise woman to intervene. In the face of probable death due to folly, he seeks life.

Abigail springs into action, hurrying (*mhr*, a word used of her three times in this narrative; cf. vv. 23 and 42) to gather a lavish feast for David's men. The provisions are delineated in detail; they are also parallel to a list given in a similar narrative later on in David's career, 2 Sam 16:1. David Gunn writes the following regarding of this parallel: "both verses belong to a context where someone, attached to a potential enemy of David, but independent of him, brings provisions to David as a conciliatory gesture."[12] What is noteworthy about Abigail's provisions is that, in some cases, they are exactly the same as those in 2 Sam 16:1

10. Levenson and Halpern, "The Political Import of David's Marriages," 512–13.

11. Ibid., 513. They continue that this is one more act of David as a "vassal repudiating his sovereign." While I agree with this idea, Levenson and Halpern go on to suggest that Nabal is a pseudonym for a wealthy chieftain, and that David is really challenging this chieftain's control over his own territory. Here they go far beyond the evidence. Nowhere do the narrator or any of characters imply that David is seeking to take over territory through his request. Equally speculative is their idea that Abigail is really David's sister (cf. Levenson, "1 Samuel 25 as Literature and History," 25–27).

12. David M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (JSOTSup 6; Sheffield: JSOT, 1978), 50.

(200 loaves of bread, 100 bunches of raisins), and in others they are exactly *twice* the amount noted for Ziba's provisions on behalf of Mephibosheth in the later text (200 figs as opposed to his 100 summer fruits, and two wineskins as opposed to his one).[13] Abigail also adds a few items not included in Ziba's list: five dressed sheep and five measures of parched grain. Even if these lists reflect traditional storytelling conventions,[14] Abigail's food offerings nevertheless represent a feast fit for a king (or a large army). Recall also that in Proverbs, Wisdom sets her table with the best of food and wine (cf. Prov 9:2 and 5).

Abigail next uses the same strategy as Jacob in his upcoming meeting with Esau in Gen 32.[15] She sends the food before her on donkeys, with a message from her servants saying that she is coming right behind (v. 19). Yet she makes a point of not telling her husband (v. 19); rather, she sets out entirely on her own.

The narrator's next words show the necessity of her hurry and strategic planning. Picture the scene: Abigail is riding a donkey under cover of the mountain, while David is coming from the other side, armed to the teeth. It seems bloodshed may be unavoidable. Add to that the narrator's insertion—*at this point*—of David's words when his troops set out, words which both retard the action and heighten the drama: "Surely it was in vain that I guarded all that belonged to this man in the wilderness—there was nothing lacking from all which was his. But he returned evil instead of good. Thus may God do to the enemies of David and thus be added if I spare any male of his [household? clan?] until morning" (vv. 21–22). Actually, this is a tame rendering. What the Hebrew really says is: "if I spare anyone who pisses against the wall until morning." Ironically, after having wished peace on Nabal and his house (v. 6), David is now bent on the opposite. All that stands in his way is a group of donkeys laden with lavish provisions and a woman riding fast to meet him.

For the second time in this narrative, the narrator describes Abigail's actions in terms of speed. Verse 23 opens with Abigail seeing David, hurrying (does the sight of the 400 armed men cause her to act even more

13. Ibid., 50.

14. So ibid., 51.

15. Both Moshe Garsiel and Mark E. Biddle make much of this connection and others that they find between 1 Sam 25 and the Jacob story; see Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study* (Ramat-Gan: Revivim, 1983), 123–30; Mark E. Biddle, "Ancestral Motifs in 1 Samuel 25: Intertextuality and Characterization," *JBL* 121 (2002): 617–38. While Garsiel confines himself to links between this story and Gen 32, however, Biddle also finds links between Abigail and Rebekah in Gen 24 (pp. 627–31). Biddle's reading in particular strains to make the links work.

swiftly?), alighting from her donkey, and bowing to the ground. Three separate phrases describe her obeisance, "she fell before David on her face, bowed down to the ground, and fell upon his feet" (vv. 23b–24aα).[16] She approaches him, not as an equal, but as a supplicant. Again, this is strategic. When one meets a man hell-bent on revenge, with an entire army riding with him, making obeisance is one way to hold up the proceedings. At the very least there is now a large group of animals, food, men, and one woman blocking the way to that revenge.

Abigail's speech, which begins in v. 24aα, continues her disarming strategy. Here is the heart of the story. The longest single prose speech by a woman in all of Hebrew Scriptures,[17] her address is a masterpiece of wise rhetoric, intentionally playing to David's sense of honor and prestige. As Fewell and Gunn put it, "She knows the man's vanity and ambition and targets it to perfection."[18] Abigail has this man's character pegged. After making obeisance she takes on the guilt which rightfully belongs to Nabal, "Let the guilt be on *me*, my lord. Let your maidservant speak in your hearing, and hear the words of your maidservant." Twice she refers to herself as maidservant in relation to him as lord.[19] Yet her speech belies her words—using a jussive followed by an imperative in the Hebrew. She clearly *expects* both an audience with David and that he would listen to her words. This is an opening designed to disarm a man in a murderous rage. By taking on guilt and through her deferential words, Abigail effectively diffuses the situation. She is also already treating him as the king she later prophesies he will become.

This beginning contains resonances between Abigail and the figure of Wisdom. Wisdom goes out in the streets and calls. Those who listen will live (cf. Prov 1:20; 8:2). Moreover, in the rest of the speech, Abigail offers the king counsel, the very role Wisdom fulfills in Proverbs (cf. Prov 8:15–16).

The second step in Abigail's speech (v. 25) basically says "do not take him to heart; he is just like his name—a *fool*." She also echoes the words uttered about Nabal to her by the servant earlier: he is a worthless man

16. For those looking for sexual innuendo, here is another possibility: Abigail doesn't fall *to*, meaning "at" his feet, but falls *upon* them.

17. Her speech is 131 words long. Only Deborah's song in Judg 5 uses more words and covers more space in terms of the number of verses.

18. Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, 156.

19. It is interesting that Abigail uses words stressing the difference between David and herself multiple times in this narrative (using one word for maidservant, *ʾamah*, three times, and its synonym, *shiphchah*, once) and the address "my lord" 14 times. This seems to be a bit of over-flattery. Yet, in the larger context of her speech, it is also quite effective.

(*bn-bly*ʿ*l*; cf. v. 17). In addition, she emphasizes that *she* did not see the messengers, hinting that the outcome would have been different if she had. This portion of her speech has three effects. First, she disassociates herself from Nabal and his actions; second, she plays with words, punning on Nabal's name, creating an "in joke" between the two of them, and conveying that David really does not need to worry about Nabal. The punning thus invites David to take a different view of the previous events and thereby hopefully excuse Nabal's behavior. Finally, the distancing and punning together align Abigail and David over against Nabal.

We can read this portion of her encounter in at least two ways (both of which are represented in scholarship). First, we can see that Abigail is desperate to save her people and finding a way to excuse Nabal is one way of doing so, even if she has to insult his character in the process. After all, both the narrator and one of the servants have already told us this *is* his character. She is therefore merely being truthful. In this reading, she is loyal to Nabal and is using the only means available to her to avoid bloodshed.[20] Or, second, Abigail is really blaming Nabal for the whole incident. She has selfish motivations, which may or may not include becoming David's wife.[21] I myself favor a middle ground: faced with 400 armed men and a very angry leader, she is trying to avert bloodshed by stating what is already well-known about her husband. Yet she is not altogether altruistic—some personal ambition is present here, as we shall see from the rest of her speech. Abigail's character is complex.

Her next rhetorical move is to counter David's previous oath (which she admittedly did not overhear) with an oath of her own. (Strong words need strong words in return!) This oath brings Yhwh into the picture: "Yhwh has restrained you from coming in blood, and has saved your hand for you" (v. 26a). Again, the words are strategic—they at once warn David of the dangers of his intended actions and claim her own role as Yhwh's ambassador and intermediary.

20. Scholars who take this tack include Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics*, 14–15.

21. Jobling is in this camp (*1 Samuel*, 154). Note that most other scholars who take this view tend also to think that Abigail murdered Nabal. Cf. Biddle, "Ancestral Motifs in 1 Samuel 25," 633. Note that Jobling mitigates this somewhat. Although he does not want to go so far as to say Abigail actually murdered Nabal, he nevertheless sees her choice of time and place as having malicious intent: "Her actions and words were calculated to hurt Nabal as much as possible… She brought him news that, in a culture of honor and shame, was sure to have a devastating effect… She spoke to Nabal when he probably had a vicious hangover and was as low as possible" (*1 Samuel*, 155). One could read the scene this way, but it is certainly not the most obvious way to read it. My own reading, given below, is quite different.

The same words imply that his *power* (hand) is at stake in this. Moreover, rather than accusing him of planning revenge and thereby incurring bloodguilt, she co-opts him, showing him through a very positive speech (Yhwh has intervened for you!) that the pain of his planned actions would be far greater than the pleasure. At stake is the very throne (bloodguilt and power).

The second half of the verse also brings Nabal's name back into the picture in a way that both implies that David's intended actions are foolish and invites David to disassociate himself from Nabal: "May your enemies and those seeking your life be like Nabal" (v. 26b). What is implicit here is the message "Do not descend to his level; Do not act like him; Do not be a *nabal*; Do not do *nblh*." As Victor Matthews writes, these words "demonstrat[e] the true difference between a wise man like David and a fool like Nabal." This sentence also positions *Abigail* with David over against Nabal, for she has indirectly identified the latter as David's enemy.[22] What is she wishing here? This is almost a curse of Nabal as well as a curse of David's enemies. Is she letting her true feelings slip, namely, that she really wishes Nabal would die?[23] Her words carry more weight than she herself could know, given Nabal's subsequent demise and the ultimate fate of the one true enemy of David—Saul—which comes to mind in light of earlier events. Like Woman Wisdom, Abigail offers a clear choice: following the way of the fool leads to death; Abigail's words, in contrast, offer her listener life.

Only now, at the center of her speech, does Abigail mention, "with almost studied casualness,"[24] the sumptuous feast she has sent before herself, asking him to give this "blessing" (*brkh*) which she has brought to the young men "who patrol at the feet of my lord" (v. 27). The Hithpael form of the Hebrew verb *hlk* is used here, an explicit verbal connection with the youths who protected Nabal's men and flocks in v. 15. Her words also deliberately belie any implication that this is protection payment or for David's own gain.[25] Her feast is intended for those who protected her property—an extension of the feast she had already prepared (cf. v. 11) for her own shearers. In this verse, she continues to

22. Jobling is right in seeing this as a very odd statement, and suggesting that it may be a wish for Nabal's death (*1 Samuel*, 154).

23. Victor H. Matthews, "Female Voices: Upholding the Honor of the Household," *BTB* 24 (1994): 8–15 (10).

24. Gunn, *The Story of King David*, 99.

25. Cf. Levenson ("1 Samuel 25 as Literature and History," 19), who says, "Far be it from him to take protection money for himself!" See also Klein (Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel* [WBC 10; Waco: Word, 1983], 280), who says, "Since David himself did not receive the present, he could not be accused of talking a bribe."

stress a difference in status between her and David—twice calling him "my lord," and referring to herself as a servant.

Here food takes on yet a different role: the feast for her shearers is extended to those who guarded the sheep. Moreover, food is offered explicitly as a blessing (*brkh*), not as a *mnkh*, which is the more usual word for gift. In this case, the food and drink are truly a blessing which has the possibility of bringing peace and life in the face of imminent battle and death.

Her next step is to ask for forgiveness, again emphasizing her servant status in relation to him as lord, and giving three motives for him to act in this merciful manner: (1) Yhwh is going to make him an established house; (2) David is fighting Yhwh's battles, and (3) "evil shall not be found in you so long as you live" (v. 28). The speech is ironic. David is planning a battle to which Yhwh did not send him; furthermore, David is planning evil. Again, Abigail uses her words wisely. The indirect argument is that since David fights Yhwh's battles and since evil is not in him, he will not do this evil deed.

The next two verses strengthen Abigail's argument, and continue the prophetic nature of her words. In v. 29, she uses a metaphor which alludes to David's earlier battle with Goliath:[26] "Should anyone arise to pursue you and to seek your life, then the life of my lord will be bound in a bundle of the living with Yhwh your God. But the lives of your enemies he shall sling away from the hollow of the sling." In the context of the *speech*, these words imply that David does not need to rely on his sword; Yhwh has already taken care of any problems/foes and will continue to do so. In the context of the *story*, the words link most immediately with a later incident. When Abigail finally tells her husband what she has done, his heart turns to stone and, ten days later, he is slung away (struck dead) by Yhwh (vv. 37–38). Of course, in the *larger picture*, these words must on some level refer to Saul, who is the only person currently seeking David's life, and they thereby presage Saul's increasing isolation and death.

In addition, vv. 28–31 reveal another role Abigail fulfills through her speech: she now becomes an intermediary in the prophetic sense.[27] Using

26. For another scholar who sees an allusion to the Goliath story here, see David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (JSOTSup 14; Sheffield: JSOT, 1980), 100. Ralph W. Klein (*1 Samuel*, 251) attempts to link "the bundle of the living" to the book of life mentioned elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures. This reading stretches the metaphor a bit too far.

27. Contra Levenson ("1 Samuel 25 as Literature and History," 21), who argues that "the narrator does not present Abigail as a prophetess in the narrower sense" but

the very words that Nathan will use later, Abigail tells David, "Yhwh will make you an established house" (v. 28; cf. 2 Sam 7:11, 13, 16). She also tells him, "Yhwh will do for you according to all the good which he spoke concerning you: Yhwh will appoint you (*ngyd*) over Israel" (v. 30; cf. 2 Sam 7:8).

Rhetorically, this portion of Abigail's speech functions to add motivation. These verses remind David of his higher goal, which his plotted action is jeopardizing. The stakes are too high for him to return evil for evil or to incur bloodguilt. It is in v. 31, however, that she makes her final appeal: "May this not be a roadblock[28] or a stumbling block of [the] heart for my lord, or a pouring out of blood in vain for you, but for my lord to save himself."

Several things are noteworthy about this appeal. First, she continues the references to "my lord," appealing to his stature and status as future king. Second, she is far more direct than she has been up to this point. She tells David this action would be a potential stumbling block to his becoming prince. Further, it is vain bloodshed; it would accomplish nothing positive. Indeed, in the larger view it would accomplish the opposite. Third, she ends with Yhwh's blessing of David, which contrasts Yhwh's good actions with David's intended evil actions. In these verses Abigail takes on two of Wisdom's roles: prophet (cf. Prov 1:20–33) and counselor to the king (cf. Prov 8:14–16).

Finally, at the end of v. 31, again highlighting their difference in status by calling herself his servant, Abigail asks to be remembered. She is not lacking in ambition herself. Some have argued that she is making a play to become David's wife, and then accuse her of killing Nabal so she could do so. However, the narrator gives us no further motivations, nor does the narrator say that Abigail is responsible in any way for her husband's subsequent death; rather, the responsibility is laid squarely at Yhwh's door (v. 38). And yet, in the context of her announcement that David will be prince, she may be angling for a political place in the

rather means "to see her to be a woman of providence, a person who in this case from intelligence…rather than from special revelation senses the drift of history." For other recent scholars taking the view that Abigail is acting as prophet in this speech, see Bach, "The Pleasure of Her Text," 44; Birch, "The First and Second Books of Samuel," 1168.

28. Literally, a "tottering." *Pukah* is a *hapax legomenon* as a noun form. Here BDB is less than helpful, suggesting that "tottering" or "staggering" means "qualm of conscience" (cf. NRSV). *HALOT* is much better, suggesting the noun means "an obstacle in the road that makes it impossible to walk safely"—hence my translation, "roadblock." (References to BDB and *HALOT* come from *Bibleworks* 5.)

coming monarchy. When Nabal dies, Abigail certainly receives that place. David definitely remembers her—by marrying her.

Abigail's speech as a whole invites David to look at the larger picture—to put his proposed actions into their proper larger context. David, by implication, cannot see the forest for the trees in his anger. Her speech says, *"Wait!* Yhwh's on your side. Yhwh has chosen you. Don't throw it all away or make the road to power more difficult." This is truly wise speech. It is effective, too, since it stops David in his tracks and causes him to respond entirely differently. This speech, like that of Wisdom, brings life rather than death, not only for Abigail's own people, but for David as well.

In addition, the gift ("blessing") of food is the centerpiece of the speech and of the chapter. Sandwiched as it is between several statements about David's future status and coming rule, this food becomes not only payment, but tribute.[29] From the very beginning, including her approach of obeisance, Abigail treats David not as a mercenary, but as a monarch.

David's response, contained in vv. 32–34, is much shorter than Abigail's; it begins with a threefold blessing (*brkh*), first of Yhwh, then of Abigail's discernment, and finally of Abigail herself (vv. 32b–33). His words of blessing to her include a recognition that she has saved him from bloodguilt as well as saving his power (Hebrew "hand"). In these verses he blesses her wisdom, using a word (*ṭʿm*), which, in other contexts, has to do with tasting (Exod 16:31; Num 11:8; 1 Sam 14:24, 43; Job 6:6; Ps 34:8 [9]; Jer 48:11). Here it clearly means discernment or good sense (cf. Job 12:20; Ps 119:66; Prov 11:22; 26:16; 31:18), but given the centrality of food to this narrative, *ṭʿm* may have underlying connotations relating to good taste as well. Abigail has the good taste to see where her future lies—with David and not with Saul (or with Nabal for that matter). In addition, her discernment and her wise words link her with Wisdom herself.

David concludes his speech by acknowledging with an oath that, through Abigail's agency, Yhwh has stayed his hand from hurting her and from killing all the males of Nabal's family (v. 34). In v. 35 he accepts the food she has brought "from her hand," and tells her, "Go up in peace to your house. See I have heard your voice and I have lifted up

29. See also Klein (*1 Samuel*, 250), whose reading agrees with mine in this respect: "this blessing [i.e. Abigail's gift of food] would seem to be tribute for the future king. Designated for the hungry, it expresses good wishes for all adherents of David." Cf. Matthews, "Female Voices," 10.

your face (i.e. restored your honor)."[30] Abigail's actions and words have averted disaster. David's actual words, "I have heard your voice" (*shm'ty bqlk*), would often, in other contexts, be translated, "I have obeyed you." It is a curious construction in this context, since it does not seem to fit the situation which Abigail has ostensibly set up: a royal audience given to a subject who is pleading for mercy. Rather, it fits Woman Wisdom far better. Wisdom is to be obeyed (cf. Prov 4:1; 5:7; 7:24; 8:32).[31] Abigail's use of imperatives (much like Wisdom in Prov 1–9), also belie her continued stress on the difference in rank. Here David acknowledges his obedience—his taking Wisdom's counsel—while the next clause, "I will lift up your face," also reminds us that he is here speaking as the *king* who takes that counsel.

The next verse returns Abigail to her home, where she finds Nabal holding a banquet in his house, like a feast for a king (the one use of the root *mlk*, "king," in this text). Once again, the narrator uses irony. Bruce C. Birch puts it well: "[Nabal's] feast is described 'like a king,' but ironically he has left an actual king outside the feast without provision except for the intervention of Abigail."[32] Because he is drunk, Abigail tells him nothing "great or small" (v. 36) until the morning. When the wine had drained out of him (a possible pun on Nabal's name, which is close to wineskin—*nbly-yn*; cf. v. 18), Abigail reports what happened. Peter Leithart suggests, based on the actual Hebrew grammar here, that the wine is literally flowing out of him while Abigail is talking with him (cf. David's previous references to "all who piss against the wall" in vv. 22, 34).[33] At any rate, Nabal's response is immediate: "his heart

30. Wiseman suggests that the phrase "Go in peace" usually marks "a successful conclusion of negotiation or assurance that the request for a desired state of relationships has been granted" (Wiseman, "'Is it Peace?'," 324; He cites specifically Exod 4:18; 1 Sam 1:17; 20:13, 42; 2 Sam 15:9; as well as several places in the Genesis narratives, including 26:29; 28:21; and 44:17. While he does not reference 1 Sam 25 in this section of his article, his idea may nevertheless apply here. See also Boyle, "The Law of the Heart," 416.

31. These verses all contain the words "listen to me." Other places where a context of obedience is stressed include "be attentive" (cf. 4:1, 20; 5:1; 7:24). It is clear throughout Prov 1–9 that Wisdom's instructions are to be obeyed in order for the learner to achieve life, prosperity, and so on.

32. Birch, "The First and Second Books of Samuel," 1167. See also Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul*, 100.

33. Leithart argues that this construction (*bet* plus an infinitive construct) could mean that Nabal was relieving himself (his translation is "while the wine was going out from Nabal, his wife told him," 526), thus creating yet one more irony in a story full of ironies. He is the "pisser" (Leithart's word) whom David set out to kill (David's oath in the Hebrew text is actually that he will not leave one person alive

died within him and he became like a stone" (v. 37). Ten days later, Yhwh smites him and he dies (v. 38). Here Abigail's prophecy about David's enemies (remember she has implicitly identified Nabal as David's enemy in v. 26) is immediately fulfilled, as it will eventually be fulfilled more fully in Saul's death.[34]

In addition, food and drink play a part in Nabal's demise. Nabal, the fool, ate the feast that led to death, while David accepted the feast leading to life. Here, too, is yet another resonance with Wisdom. In her first speech in Proverbs, Wisdom says of fools: "Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, they would have none of my counsel and despised my reproof, therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way and be sated with their own devices. For waywardness kills the simple, and the complacency of fools destroys them" (Prov 1:29–32). Nabal's feast has just such a flavor to it. And his complacency certainly leads to his destruction.

The story does not end there, however. The denouement occurs once David finds out about Nabal's death. His response is clearly one of vindication. He blesses Yhwh, "who decided the case of my shame from the hand of Nabal and has restrained his servant from evil; but Yhwh has caused the evil of Nabal to return upon his head" (v. 39). He then immediately remembers Abigail, as she asked, by sending and speaking to her "in order to take her as his wife" (v. 40). Abigail does obeisance one last time, and stresses the difference in station between her and David one last time: "your servant is a handmaid to wash the feet of the servants of my lord."[35] Then she does her last swift act—"she hurried and arose and

who "pisses against the wall" by daybreak, vv. 22, 34). According to Leithart, the next morning, as he is doing that very thing, Abigail reports her encounter with David and his heart dies within him, and he turns to stone. David's initial intent is hence fulfilled. See Peter J. Leithart, "Critical Note: Nabal and His Wine," *JBL* 120 (2001): 525–27.

34. Here is one of the aspects of this text which supports one of the readings of traditional scholarship, namely, that Nabal is really a cipher for Saul in this narrative. For representatives of this view, see n. 2.

35. Édouard Lipiński ("In Reference to I. Zatelli's Paper: Kinship Terminology in 1 Sam 25:40–42," *Zeitschrift für Althebraistik* 7 [1994]: 12–16 [12]) has written an interesting note on the two terms used in this verse, *ʾamah*, and *shiphchah*, which are usually translated synonymously as "maidservant." He argues that the first term "expresses a relationship of dependence existing in antiquity between a priestess or hierodule and the deity, between the wife and her husband, the daughter and her father, the employee and her employer, the maid and her master, the slave and her owner." He argues, further, on the basis of the use in other ancient West Semitic languages (pp. 13–14), that in this case the word refers to Abigail's status as wife: "*ʾāmāh* is here a synonym of *ʾiššāh*, used among persons of high status or in a

mounted the donkey"—and, with five maids attending her (hardly the status of a servant), followed the messengers of David and became his wife (v. 41). She is fated not to become the most important wife of David, however. In v. 43 we are told that David also married Ahinoam of Jezreel. Moreover, David gains land, sheep, and status by taking over Nabal's property. Thus, David consolidated his power in the south through marriage.

Lest we think that this woman, for all her wisdom, beauty, hospitality, and rhetorical brilliance, escapes the confines of patriarchy, however, it is wise to acknowledge that, once married, Abigail loses her voice. There are two further times Abigail is mentioned in the biblical text: (1) we are eventually told that she has a son, Chileab; and (2) she, along with Ahinoam, is rescued from the clutches of a neighboring king who has kidnapped them—but she never comes to prominence again. Here Alice Bach's analysis of 1 Sam 25 is insightful. Bach says that the text silences Abigail in the end: "Our last image of her is as she is riding subdued toward David's house in the company of female servants, playing her role as traditional wife, obeying the will of her husband. How different the passionate ride down the mountainside in the company of male servants! Shut away from the action of the story, Abigail is no longer a threat."[36]

Nevertheless, as my reading has shown, throughout the story of Abigail and David, there are strong resonances between Abigail's actions and speech and those of Wisdom in Prov 1:9. Some scholars have lifted up Abigail as fulfilling the *ʾsht chyl* role (literally, the "woman of valor" role) of the ideal wife in Prov 31,[37] a problematic connection, in my

refined language. Its counterpart is *ʾadōn*, both in 1 Sam 25:41 and in 1 Kings 1:17" (p. 14). He also argues that *shiphchah* is in semantic opposition to *ʾamah*, and designates a houseborn servant. Thus "1 Samuel 24:40–42 means: 'Here is your wife (acting) as a house-maid to wash the feet of my spouse's officers'" (p. 14). If we apply this information to the rest of the chapter, then Abigail's references to herself as both *ʾamah* (twice in v. 24) and *shiphchah* (in v. 27) may read quite differently than I have done above. Her references to herself as *ʾamah* may be read ambiguously: Is she really calling herself a "maidservant," or is she already angling to become "wife" to her "lord?"

36. Bach, "The Pleasure of Her Text," 49. Bach goes on to say that being married to Nabal actually gave Abigail more freedom than she has later in the story (p. 49). Perhaps, according to this reading, she was better off married to the fool! I wonder if Abigail would agree. While this reading is provocative, I do not concur with Bach's characterization of Abigail as mother-provider (see pp. 43, 45, and 49). Nowhere in this text do I see Abigail taking on a motherly role.

37. See, for example, Levenson, "1 Samuel 25 as Literature and History," 21. Levenson tries to tame Abigail by denying her autonomy, ignoring her speech, and

opinion, given her words about her current husband in the story.[38] However, I have not yet seen anyone explore the strong resonances between Abigail and Woman Wisdom herself. Some clues to such a reading have already been given along the way, but due to the constraints of space, I will only sketch out some of these resonances a bit further than I have already done in my reading.

First, as I noted above, despite Abigail's continual stress on the difference in rank between her and David, her speech contains authority. Her use of imperatives, coupled with the increasing directness of rhetoric, as well as her swift action in the face of danger, all combine to create a picture of a woman used to being in charge. Wisdom herself speaks through invitation and imperative throughout Prov 1–9. Second, Claudia Camp argues that the following roles are assigned to Wisdom in the book of Proverbs: Wisdom acts "as a prophet (Prov 1:20–33) who condemns the mass of fools but offers hope to the individual righteous person…, as a lover and wife (4:6–9; 7:4–5; 8:17), as a counselor (8:14–16) as a house builder and provider of food (9:1–6)."[39] As I have noted throughout my reading, Abigail fills most of these roles in 1 Sam 25. She acts as prophet to David, and acts as a wife first to Nabal, and later to David, although she does not take on the role of lover in this story. She also acts as house builder, not literally as in Prov 9:1–6, but figuratively, through her persuasion of David not to throw away the house Yhwh will establish for him). In addition, her entire speech places her in the role of counselor to the king (and, not incidentally, peacemaker).

Finally, and most importantly, she is the provider of food. And that provision itself brings life in the face of threatened death. Like the contrast between the feasts of Wisdom and Folly in Prov 9, we have in this text paired feasts: the one which the wise woman Abigail offers, and the "feast like a king" of which Nabal ("folly") partakes. The resonances continue. Wisdom goes out into the crossroads to call people to follow her—into public space. Likewise, Abigail leaves domestic space to confront someone bent on folly and to invite him to a life-giving feast. In

relegating her to "ideal wife" status, which she really does not fit. This is analogous to an attempt by many scholars to tame her by associating her with the ideal wife of Prov 31; see, for example, Thomas McCreesh, "Wisdom as Wife: Proverbs 31:10–31," *RB* 92 (1985): 25–46, who attempts to neutralize Wisdom by merging her with the ideal wife of Prov 31 and having her "settle down" to married life.

38. See also Bach, "The Pleasure of Her Text," 49.

39. Claudia V. Camp, "Female Voice, Written Word: Women and Authority in Hebrew Scripture," in *Embodied Love: Sensuality and Relationship as Feminist Values* (ed. P. Cooey and S. Farmer; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 97–113 (103–4).

contrast, Nabal, like Woman Folly in Prov 9:13–18, stays in his house. Both his foolish actions and the "feast like a king," of which he partakes in his complacency, play a part in his death.

Food and drink thus also play an important role in this story revolving around feasting. Not only are food and drink the occasion for feasting (both positively and negatively), but they also play several other roles in the story, all connected to the central female character. The woman Abigail uses food as a method of payment for protection, as provisions for an army, as reward for those who watched over people and sheep, as the currency of exchange in negotiations, and as tribute for a future king. In addition, a woman, food, and drink pave the way to the possibility of averting bloodshed and bloodguilt—they are life-giving in the very basic sense of the word.

This text sets out the way of folly and the way of wisdom. David almost followed the way of folly, and it could have been the death of his ambitions. And yet, through Abigail's blessings of food and persuasive speech,[40] he ends up choosing the way of life, leaving a clear path to the throne. Food in this text is truly the agent of blessing for David. While Nabal's feast "like a king" ends in his death, the feast which Abigail offered, and which David accepted, was a feast fit for a king.

Had this story ended differently, David might have remained an outlaw running a protection racket. He might have accumulated enough power and influence to become a Godfather figure. Instead, Abigail's actions enable him to move to higher ground—to become a king instead of merely a protector.

40. This is an extraordinary dialogue—a kind of dialogue between men and women not normally found in ancient Near Eastern literature.

Four Vignettes from the Life of David: Recollections of the Royal Court

David Penchansky

Interpretation of ancient texts, particularly but not exclusively narrative texts, involves the imagination. Readers generally seek to understand motivation of characters, and they construct possible scenarios that would explain unusual or ambiguous features of the story. The long-standing Jewish tradition of Midrash imagines stories that fill in the gaps left by the narrative details of the Bible. Similarly, Muslims fill out the Qur'an with stories about the Prophet, his family and his companions that explain the context of individual suras. These ancient religious stories have ambiguities, and these ambiguities inspire subsequent readers to fill them out. David's stories in 1 and 2 Samuel are those kinds of stories.

Hebrew narrative is loath to reveal characters' inner voices, but the contemporary reader wants to know what David and the others are thinking. In most cases, the authors leave out motivation and intention. As readers we may supply plausible scenarios. At times the ancient author even elides key elements of the plot. This absence draws in the reader, who then participates in the production of meaning.

I do not address the issues of whether David is a historical figure. However, the *literary* character that the putative author named David is alive and well. The Samuel narratives portray a three-dimensional, though complex, picture of his personality. David is a fully realized literary figure, full of contradictions. The pious and heroic David of later traditions is less present in these stories, putatively their source.

In this essay I take a number of problematic stories about King David in 1 and 2 Samuel, and write plausible reconstructions that might adequately explain their lacunae. David and the other characters in the story *could* have thought these thoughts. These inner intentions might have motivated the characters (David and the others) to act the way they do in the biblical text. They might have been there in the interstices between events of the plot.

In one of my examples, Michal said regarding her husband, King David, "How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' maids, as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself!" (2 Sam 6:20). What exactly does Michal here say David did? Ambiguities such as these provide some of the requisite space and the raw materials by which we might fill out the narrative with motivations and inner voices.

In another of my examples, King Saul said regarding his son Jonathan, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman, do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and the shame of your mother's nakedness?" (1 Sam 20:30). David Gunn (with Danna Fewell) has made a compelling case that Saul here accuses Jonathan of having a sexual relationship with David. What sort of impact would such a relationship have in David's rise to power? David Gunn has done pioneering work in his examinations of the construction of gender in the ancient Israelite literature. In his writing he is clearly not unaware that the way we analyze and interpret these stories influences contemporary attitudes. When I consider the way people use these and other biblical passages to support their position on issues of homosexual rights and women's rights, I know he is correct.

Vignette #1: Michal and Paltiel

I start in the middle of the larger story of David. He has fled to the south. Michal, Saul's daughter, has divorced him and remarried.

Paltiel had married Michal after her father, Saul, permitted her to divorce David. David abandoned her when he had fled south to escape from Saul, who wanted him dead. Paltiel's aristocratic pedigree and powerful family made him a good match for the princess. That he was the youngest son of a large family of boys made him an appropriate husband for a wellborn woman in her second marriage. Michal was a bit older than him.

When his father told him he must marry the princess, he dutifully agreed, although he had never met her. In Gibeah he had seen her on the streets, accompanied by her ladies-in-waiting. They had never spoken.

In previous years, Paltiel had made some efforts to involve himself with his father's affairs, overseeing the lands and the agricultural slaves, but now he only had a passion for music and socializing with his friends. He had not made a practice of visiting prostitutes as his brothers had, and was innocent in the affairs of women. As the baby of the family, he had been pampered, spoiled and sheltered from any kind of trouble or pain.

Michal had formed a hard shell after David humiliated her, leaving her in Gibeah. Furthermore, Michal's father would not soon forgive her complicity in David's escape. She knew that this new marriage was a bit beneath her, but after David, she was through marrying for love based upon adolescent crushes.

The wedding between Michal and Paltiel, both solemn and festive, passed quickly, and if the wedding night was less-than-satisfactory, the couple's good will offered compensation for their disappointment. Paltiel seemed a child, an eager puppy of a boy, but the marriage served her father's political purposes and she was eager to get back on his good side.

Paltiel was struck, first by her regal beauty, and then by her forceful personality. He became completely devoted to her, and her defenses fell. Against everyone's expectations, she began to like Paltiel, and then even more. They built a life together and became friends. She remained aloof from the drama of her father's pursuit of David in the southern wilderness. She paid no attention to news of David's rise and fall of fortune in the territories of Judah and Philistia. Her infatuation with *that* handsome young rake was now an embarrassment to her and a bad memory.

Then in the battle of Gilboa against the Philistines, Michal's father and three of her brothers were killed. The throne fell to Ish-Baal, her younger brother. The southern tribe of Judah submitted to David, who had become a powerful chieftain in the southern wilderness. Ish-Baal was ill-prepared to assume the responsibilities of office, and Abner, Saul's commander, made most of the administrative and military decisions. An inconclusive and half-hearted war between David's forces in the south and Abner's forces little affected the new couple, living in their own house with a few servants.

When Abner showed up at their door one day, she could not have anticipated that David was still capable of destroying her happiness. Abner demanded that Michal leave with him and return to David. David claimed prior "ownership" of Michal, whom he had purchased from her father for a sack of Philistine foreskins. Michal saw it all in an instant. David always had ambitions to become king of Israel. He had this in his heart from the time that he first entered her father's court. It would greatly aid his cause if he was still married to King Saul's daughter, and if she bore him sons who would be King Saul's grandsons. Her father's counselors and the leading northern families would never have allowed a southerner to rule over them. But all these objections would evaporate if David enabled the continuation of King Saul's dynasty. David wanted to use Michal to advance himself politically. And there was not a thing that Michal could do to stop it.

Silently, she and her personal slave started to pack a few things, just what they could carry on the journey to Hebron. "Hebron!" she thought. In what kind of backwater Judean hell-hole would she now have to make her home? She sighed. Paltiel looked on incredulously. His eyes (poor dear!) showed no comprehension of what was about to take place. When she walked out the door with her servant, both carrying bags, he tried to follow. "No, Paltiel, my dear husband," she explained. "We have no choice in this matter. I have to go with them. My father and Jonathan are dead, and my brother the king is weak. This man and David together now control my destiny. Goodbye, my husband." She touched his cheek with affection, turned and walked away. She looked back once and caught his eyes.

As they turned the corner by an old oak tree, and joined the trade road going south, she heard Paltiel behind her, and his great wrenching sobs penetrated her heart. She turned and saw him following behind, half-blinded by tears, staggering with the force of his moans and cries. "Michal, dearest, please, come back! Return to me! I beg you." Tears came to her eyes, but she would not break down. She would be strong. She was a king's daughter, after all. The soldiers all stopped, turned and gazed at the spectacle.

"Go on, go on," she ordered the soldiers, speaking with a commanding authority and poise she had not felt since David had left her and broken her spirit. The men obeyed instinctively, even though they were under the command of Abner and technically she was in their custody.

Abner, surprised at his men's reaction to the princess, turned his attention to Paltiel, who still kept a respectful distance. Abner was a tall man, grizzled and heavily built. He ruled his men as much by his strength and cruelty as by the authority delegated to him by the boy-king. He stared at the smaller man, Paltiel, and fingered the handle of his sword, right hand reaching over to the scabbard on his left side. His oppressive stare and battle stance gave Paltiel pause. "Go home, little man. There is nothing for you here. Go home and stop bothering us. Now!" The last he snarled in the voice he used to issue orders that would not be disobeyed.

Paltiel wanted with all his heart to die for his lady, the princess Michal. Visions passed through his mind where he would make a courageous though hopeless stand against Abner and his soldiers, cut down defending his home, his honor, and his lady. He felt humiliated, shamed and dishonored by the invasion of his domain, and the disruption of his marriage. But Paltiel remained a soft man, unseasoned in battle. He had never risked his life or physical safety for anything.

He reasoned thusly: "If I try and resist Abner to rescue my wife, he will kill me easily. I have no weapon, and even if I did, I wouldn't know how to use it. And Michal will still have to go with them and return to David. I will have accomplished nothing except to get myself killed. I will return later with some of my father's men, and we will rescue her."

But Paltiel knew he would not rescue Michal. He knew that Michal would soon be in another man's bed, the bed of her former husband David. He knew there was nothing he could do to change that. Helplessness and humiliation overwhelmed him. He turned his back to the soldiers and began to walk slowly home. The soldiers laughed and jeered as he walked, each insult feeling worse than if they had tossed one of their spears into his back. He wished they had.

Vignette #2: Recollections of a Handmaid

> And David danced before YHWH with all his might; and David was girded with a linen ephod… And they brought in the ark of YHWH, and set it in its place, inside the tent which David had pitched for it; and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before YHWH. And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of YHWH of hosts, and distributed among all the people, the whole multitude of Israel, both men and women, to each a cake of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins. Then all the people departed, each to his house. And David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, "How the king of Israel honored himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' maids, as one of the vulgar fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!" (2 Sam 6:14, 17–20)

What might Michal have seen or heard that made her say that the king of Israel had "honored himself" (heavy sarcasm) by "uncovering himself" "as one of the vulgar fellows," and that "his servants' maids" had witnessed it? David was bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem in festal procession. Acting as priest, he offered sacrifice and danced. His dance was sexual. David crudely displayed his genitals and which dismayed the queen.

David had worn a linen shift, an ephod, which served (in this context) as a priestly undergarment. Perhaps in the enthusiasm of his dance the garment rode up and he accidentally exposed what was underneath. But more likely the suggestive movements were part of his sexual acting out as the new chief of the Israelite people, the new "first man."

David danced sexually to establish and strengthen his power as chief. For a chieftain to rule effectively, the people expected him to be a sexual

athlete. They commonly believed that when a tribal leader had sexual relations with many women, and when many women bore children to him, it would insure the fertility of the land and the prosperity of the tribe or nation. David's ambitions and the people's expectations required David to flaunt his sexuality. And further, the procession was religious. The Ark represented the presence of Yahweh in their midst. David offered sacrifices to Yahweh. In his sexual dance, David invoked the presence of a powerful male deity. He acted in Yahweh's stead, possessed by the God. David's dance underscores his brazen sexuality and gives some early cues as to his charisma and ability to manipulate popular opinion.

This vignette tells the story from the perspective of one of the lower status maids ("servants of your maids") who might have seen the dance:

"On the day David danced his sacred dance before the Ark, I had stepped out of the hot kitchen for a few moments. In there, we prepared the food David would have us distribute later. I stood, my back pressed against the outer wall of the palace as David passed wearing a priest's white undergarment, streaked with grime and sweat. As he passed, he looked at us, a group of twelve to fifteen young, unmarried women. He gyrated his hips, arms held overhead, breathless for the moment. He opened an eye and winked lasciviously at us. His gaze caught mine, and before I could turn away, he pulled me to the middle of the street, and the entire procession halted.

"I was not terrified. He put his hands on my hips and began to spin with me, the drums in steady, repetitious beat. My eyes fixed upon his, and he placed my hands on his shoulders. He circled faster.

"Round and round, the street, the procession, my co-workers all a blur, but David, my David, completely still against the blurred background, eyes filled with delight and ardor. We circled for a long time, our feet floating in the air, it seemed, and not on the cobbles of the street.

"Finally, we stopped. David held me close as our knees buckled a bit from dizziness. Then I heard the crowd gasp. The drums stopped. Following the crowd's gaze, I looked down in alarm. David's ephod had ridden up past his thighs, exposing him from the waist down.

"I screamed, broke away, dashed through my gawking friends, and back into the safety of the steaming kitchen. I am told that David pulled down and straightened his garment, made a friendly greeting motion with his hand, signaled for the drums to start again, and began dancing forward. He led the procession towards the tent he had pitched in a fallow field next to his palace.

"I would not tell the others in the kitchen the reason for the strange look in my eyes, or the color in my face, but they found out quickly enough when the others returned. I cared nothing for their teasing. I had danced with the king."

Vignette #3: David and Michal

In the dialogue that follows David and his wife, the queen Michal, argue from entirely different social contexts. Michal, a king's daughter, has a strong sense of propriety. Kings must act in certain ways, and the separation between the classes must always be maintained. Vulgar, lower-class fellows dance lasciviously in public. Perverts expose themselves to young women. A king acts with dignity and aristocratic bearing. A king remains apart and aloof from the common people.

David on the other hand, the consummate politician, realizes that with no established dynasty he rules by popular acclaim. He needs the admiration of his people, and his strategy is set out in the last statement he makes to Michal: "I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in my own eyes; but by the maids of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor'" (2 Sam 6:22). David intends to act like a vulgar fellow as a means to draw the crowds to him. His down-to-earth charisma will endear him to them, make them comfortable with him, not feel inferior. It was a brilliant political stroke.

There remains no adequate representation of this dance in the history of art or in contemporary cinema. Medieval paintings depict a stately march by David along with the Ark, solemn and not joyful, staid and not ecstatic. In the film *King David* (1985, Bruce Beresford, director), American actor Richard Gere pranced about in an embarrassing display of graceless vamping. But David in 2 Sam 6 drew the crowd's admiration by his entertaining though vulgar display. We might imagine a screenplay for the scene as follows:

[*The scene opens with Michal coming out of the palace to meet David.*]

David: Michal, assemble the children, the wives and the servants. I want to bless them.

Michal: What an ass I have for a husband! What a pretentious fool. You make yourself priest as well as king? Who gave you the right?

David: This is a good day for me, and your bitterness drains my joy.

Michal: You deserve no joy after what you've done.

David: Don't speak in riddles, woman. What exactly have I done?

Michal: I saw your dance in front of the palace. Disgusting pig! Peasant! Animal!

David: [*his anger rising*] What are you talking about?

Michal: You exposed yourself like an old pathetic drunk in the streets. You waved your thing at women like a low-class slave. And you, a king. [*She spat on the floor in disgust, and made a cursing sign with her hands.*]

David: [*grinning at the memory*] Oh yes, that. [*And then the anger flooded him again. His raised voice becomes a shout.*] Never forget woman, Yahweh chose me over your father and brothers.

[*David stops. Has he gone too far this time? Michal's time of mourning for her father and brother had not yet ended, and lines etched in her face showed her grief.*]

Michal: You should never have said such a thing. I will never forgive those words. We both know that you must produce a child with me, my father's grandson, as your heir, combining our two houses. I'm not as I was then, the naïve child with a crush on the big, brave hero. Know this, my noble husband. I have a dagger in my bedchamber, handy, and I know how to use it. If you so much as try to approach me I swear by Yahweh I will gut you.

David: [*Sputtering, desperate.*] What are you saying? You…you…

[*In a fury, he leaves her.*]

All the servants knew that the king never visited Michal's bedchamber in the Women's Palace. Some said that God had shut up Michal's womb as a punishment for her hatred of David. Some said that David punished her when he bypassed her in the harem in favor of other wives. But those servants who had heard the argument between the two knew the truth.

"And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death" (2 Sam 6:23). Interpreters have disagreed as to what this means: Either (1) God punished Michal with infertility because she disrespected her husband in the way that she mocked his exuberant worship; or (2) David punished Michal by not sleeping with her. David had other aristocratic wives whose fathers would support his regime. As it turned out, he no longer needed Michal to produce any heirs for Saul so as to establish his legitimacy. But for Michal as an ancient Near Eastern woman, lacking children rendered her valueless to herself and to her society. It was the worst punishment David could think of to cause his hated wife to suffer. Alternatively, (3) Michal, in anger over her ill treatment, refused David the legitimacy that he craved. Considering the way David used Michal, I prefer the last alternative.

Vignette #4: David and Jonathan

This is an account of David's relationship with Jonathan. It is both a confessional and a self-justification. The fissures at the heart of David's personality become especially prominent here. David both loves Jonathan and ruthlessly uses him. It deeply offends David that some have accused him of complicity in Jonathan's death. But at the end of the relevant passages I am not fully convinced of David's innocence. So I picture David frustrated when his efforts to destroy Jonathan's reputation backfired. Now, bereft of his closest friend, utterly alone, he wonders how things might have been.

In this section, my dependence upon David Gunn is most obvious.[1] I aim here to flesh out Gunn's interpretation of 1 Sam 20:30:

> Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman, do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and the shame of your mother's nakedness?"

Do the words of 1 Samuel suggest a sexual relationship between David and Jonathan? Gunn says yes, but adds that the relationship was not mutual, but one sided. David used Jonathan as he used Michal, as a means to advance his power, to aid him in taking the monarchy. Speaking in the first person, David says:

"For me, sex and power are nearly indistinguishable. I found out early in my life that people fawned over me, fell in love with me. Michal, Saul's daughter was 'in love' with me, but I never loved her. When I married her, I linked myself to the royal line. Jonathan, her brother, was different—but sex and power got all mixed up with that one too. I tell the story here.

"I met Jonathan when I first moved to the royal compound. My early close association with King Saul brought me in contact with his attractive son. In the court I drew more attention than he did, but he seemed not to mind. Everyone knew that Saul intended to make him king, and he had therefore resigned himself to its inevitability. Similar in age, we became friends, escaping the oppressive court atmosphere for days of hunting. I saw the way Jonathan looked at me on those trips. Jonathan never could conceal his feelings. He had fallen in love with me. No big

1. See especially David M. Gunn, "A Fearful Dominion: Constructions of Homosexuality in the Hebrew Bible" (unpublished, sadly), and in a shortened form in Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 148–52.

deal. Everybody fell in love with me. I certainly took advantage of these opportunities Yahweh set before me. I saw in Jonathan's obsessive attention something I could use. He fed me information from the king's intimate councils. I knew Saul's intentions towards me as soon as Jonathan found out. King Saul trusted him completely, and assumed that Jonathan's loyalty was assured. He was heir to the throne.

"I never understood that about Jonathan—power meant nothing to him. He carried authority comfortably within himself, while I had to claw and scrape for every bit of control I had. Jonathan had about him an air of nobility. Everybody knew it and respected him. Sometimes I charmed people into obeying me, but if that did not work, I used violence and the threat of violence. But Jonathan commanded respect just by being Jonathan. He was generous and big-hearted.

"I betrayed Jonathan, but I had to do it. I would never become king if the people loved Saul's son. I could not kill him, however. He was my friend, and had risked a good deal because of his love for me. However, I hated him for his advantages, for the easy way he accepted people's respect, his unbroken resolve always to do the right thing. I determined that I would tell evil stories about my friend. I mention to a few that Jonathan had been my lover, and that he took the female part. I spoke casually to a few of the servants to lay a groundwork, and then to some of our mutual friends. It was true. I poked him a few times. I did it because it kept him happy and loyal to me.

"Once, when hunting in the woods we made a covenant with each other. We were young. We took oaths. We made vows. We swore allegiance. We exchanged clothes in a solemn ritual of friendship. It moved me. I looked him in the eyes and knew that he would even give me the kingdom if I wanted it.

"Soon enough, the stories I had spread reached the king's ears. That Jonathan took the 'female part' in our lovemaking infuriated the king. It shamed and dishonored his entire clan. I knew Saul would take it that way. I meant him to take it that way. Though not present at the grand confrontation, I heard Jonathan suffered a scorching rebuke. Saul charged Jonathan with 'uncovering the nakedness of his mother,' a terrible accusation, and coming from his father's mouth, even worse. Jonathan said nothing. He just stood there while his father scolded and insulted him. Now everyone would know Jonathan's secret. Saul said in front of all, 'you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame.' When I heard how Saul had exposed Jonathan to a public humiliation, I knew that Jonathan was finished.

"A strain existed between us from that point, but Jonathan still looked out for me. He warned me that his father secretly had ordered soldiers to

kill me, and he warned me again to avoid his father's upcoming feast, which had I attended, Saul would have beheaded me. We said goodbye in those same woods where we had first spoken vows to each other. We hugged and wept. I would never see him again.

"Jonathan died fighting against the Philistines, side by side with his father and brothers in a losing battle against outnumbering forces. On Mount Gilboa, Philistine arrows pierced him, and Philistine swords cut him.

"Since then, my enemies have spread rumors that I was complicit in Jonathan's death. People who despise my rule spread such lies. My stomach fell in grief when I heard of Jonathan's death, and I ordered the Amalekite messenger executed who brought to me the news.

"Though stricken with sadness at his death, I betrayed Jonathan one final time. For King Saul's death memorial I composed a funeral ode which I recited to the crowd. Before me stood the surviving royal family and members of the court. I had never before attempted such a delicate political maneuver. I dared not say anything bad about Jonathan because the people would have risen against me in outrage. So how might I diminish him while at the same time appearing to offer him praise? This is what I sang:

> Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely!
> In life and death they were not divided;
> They were swifter than eagles,
> they were stronger than lions…
> I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;
> very pleasant have you been to me:
> your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.

"I told the audience about Jonathan's 'wonderful love,' while at the same time informing the crowd that having Jonathan was better than any sex I ever enjoyed with a woman. I saw the smirk on their faces. Who would want their future king to act like a girl? Nobody spoke of anything else for weeks.

"I wonder what sort of king Jonathan would have made? What if he had survived, and that the northern part of the kingdom declared *him* king instead of his younger (less qualified and less experienced) brother—would I have so easily and readily wrested the kingdom from *his* hands and absorbed it into my domain? Would I have wanted to? Or perhaps King David and King Jonathan would have ruled side-by-side as blood brothers, in a bond made many years ago in the woods?

"Ah Jonathan! Would Israel have been better people had you not died? Would I have been a better David?"

READING BACKWARDS: A NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE FOR THE QUEERING OF DAVID, SAUL, AND SAMUEL*

Randall C. Bailey

As one approaches biblical interpretation one has to be aware of one's own biases and one's concepts of what the Bible is and how it functions as text. These notions become increasingly important as one notes the multiplicity of interpretations that have developed claiming particularity in reading strategies. As feminist, womanist, mujerista, bosadi, Afrocentric, Asian, and queer readers have shown us, all readers come to texts with personal, cultural, gender, sexual, class, and race understandings and questions.[1] While some have criticized these forms of interpretation

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1. One of the earliest treatments of feminist biblical interpretation was Letty M. Russell, ed., *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985). Classic compilations of feminist interpretation of biblical books are found in Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, eds., *Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1998), and Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary* (New York: Crossroads, 1994). Womanist biblical interpretation reads from the experience of US Black women and takes into consideration race, class, and gender in its readings. One of the earliest biblical treatments from this perspective, which is directed toward lay readers, is Renita J. Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego: LuraMedia, 1988). See also Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Katie Geneva Cannon, eds., *Interpretation for Liberation* (Semeia 47; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), and Gay L. Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2002). Mujerista theology is term coined by Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz in her work, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996). It speaks to reading texts

as too particular, one comes to see Alt's "Tribes of YHWH" and Noth's theory of amphictyony as attempts to reconstruct Israel's history on the model of the rise of the Germanic state.[2] Similarly, the use of Stone, Bronze, and Iron as names for archaeological ages to be followed by Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine, inscribes a racialist view that until the "right type of European nation" comes into power, one should name the ages after the predominating metal, as though no nation controlled the area prior to the invasion of Alexander. In other words, all interpretation is particular.

through the experiences of Latinas. See also Elsa Tamez, ed., *Through Her Eyes: Women's Theology from Latin America* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989). Bosadi biblical interpretation is a term coined by Madipoane Masenya in her work, *How Worthy Is the Woman of Worth? Reading Proverbs 31:10–31 in African-South Africa* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004). It speaks to reading the text through the lenses of African South-African women.

The classic work on Afrocentric biblical interpretation is Cain Hope Felder, *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991). See also the two volumes edited by Randall C. Bailey, *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 22 (1994), and *Yet with a Steady Beat: Contemporary U.S. Afrocentric Biblical Interpretation* (Semeia Studies 42; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), for works done by the second generation of Black biblical scholars after *Stony the Road.* See also Brian K. Blount et al., eds., *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), and Hugh R. Page et al., eds., *The Africana Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, forthcoming).

On Asian biblical interpretation, see Khiok-khng Yeo, *What Has Jerusalem to Do with Beijing? Biblical Interpretation from a Chinese Perspective* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1998); Tat-siong Benny Liew, ed., *The Bible in Asian America* (Semeia 90/91; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), as well as his authored volume, *What is Asian American Biblical Interpretation? Reading the New Testament* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008).

On queer biblical interpretation, see Deryn Guest et al., eds., *The Queer Bible Commentary* (London: SCM, 2006), and her authored volume, *When Deborah Met Jael: Lesbian Biblical Hermeneutics* (London: SCM, 2005); Theodore Jennings, Jr., *Jacob's Wound: Homoerotic Narrative in the Literature of Ancient Israel* (New York: Continuum, 2005); Robert Goss and Mona West, eds., *Take Back the Word: A Queer Reading of the Bible* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2000); Ken Stone, ed., *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2001), and his authored volume, *Practicing Safer Texts: Food, Sex and Bible in Queer Perspective* (London: T&T Clark International, 2005).

2. Albrecht Alt, "The Formation of the Israelite State in Palestine," in *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (trans. R. A. Wilson; Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), 171–237; Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1981). For examples of how this tendency functions in New Testament studies, see Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

As Mary Ann Tolbert has shown us,[3] we all read with interpretive strategies, some that help and some that harm us. As she argues, even women who identify themselves as feminists are often massaged by misogynistic texts. How often have we heard women say, "Well we just have to remember that back then it was a patriarchal society," as a way of excusing the text for its misogyny? Similarly, sad as it makes me feel to say it, one can hear in Black congregations in the US that "slaves be obedient to your masters" really just means "you should do what your boss tells you to do." In other words, one can read from one's own social location, or one can adopt another's social location, especially that of an oppressive other, and read through their eyes. One can be trained to read and interpret through the eyes of the oppressor.

As Audre Lorde has shown us, as liberationists, we must be multifocal and look at varieties of interpretations and their intersections.[4] We must, as we combat oppression of race, also combat oppressions around gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and the like. We must be trained to "read with" all oppressed groups and to see the text from various vantage points. In this way Lorde challenges us to learn to read through the eyes of multiple groups, especially multiple oppressed groups. As proponents of these groups of interpreters have all argued, arguing for an essentialized form of interpretation or interpreter works against the liberationist contributions of these multiple interpretive communities.[5] One need not be a member of a particular community to "read with" that community or to learn how to employ the interpretive lens of that group.

Most recent of these theories of interpretation, queer theory has shown us how to identify and expose heterosexist tendencies in interpretation and in the text itself. It has also shown us how to resist such readings.[6] Since hetero-normativity is a hegemonic construct, these scholars press that one become resistant readers to it. As Guest argues, the assumption that all characters in a narrative are heterosexual until proven otherwise is a key tool of heteronormativity, keeping one locked into the hetero/homo binary construct. Adopting such a strategy helps to keep

3. Mary Ann Tolbert, "Protestant Feminists and the Bible: On the Horns of a Dilemma," in *The Pleasure of Her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts* (ed. Alice Bach; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 3–23.

4. Audrey Lorde, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," in *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology* (ed. Margaret L. Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins; 2d ed.; Boston: Wadsworth, 1995), 542–40.

5. Guest, *When Deborah Met Jael*, 15–19 and 37–38; Liew, *What is Asian American Biblical Interpretation?*, 5, 9.

6. Cf. works cited in n. 1, above.

same-gender loving people on the periphery and seen as exotic.[7] When one goes against these "rules of reading," one also has to be prepared for the resistance which will be posed to such readings, since paradigm shifts come at a great price. In a meeting of the Bible Translation and Utilization Committee of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, which I have chaired, I raised the lesbian reading of Ruth's pledge to Naomi in 1:16–17 as a marriage ceremony.[8] Bruce Metzger, the editor of the NRSV Bible, responded, "That is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard," to which I responded, "No, Bruce, that is not the most ridiculous thing you have heard. Rather, it is an indication of how much heterosexism forms your reading."

In another instance in the same group, I asked Walter Harrelson, the editor of the Hebrew Bible part of the NRSV, why it breaks Gen 39:6 in half, placing the first half ("Potiphar put everything he had into Joseph's hand…") at the end of the first unit, and placing the second half ("Now Joseph was handsome and good looking") at the beginning of the second unit.[9] He responded, "Because that's how any normal person would read it." So now claims or disclaimers to normalcy are used to defend hetero-normative readings.

On the other hand, in talking with Horace Griffin of General Theological Seminary in New York and author of *Their Own Receive Them Not: African American Lesbians & Gays in Black Churches*, about some of my queer readings, he rejected them out of hand on the grounds that, "We all know the environment in which these texts were written was hetero-normative." I responded, "But if my readings hold, that challenges that assumption, doesn't it?" It appears that we have all been trained, reared, developed with the notion that either the Bible is against same gender sex or that there are only six passages in the text which speak to some form of same-gender sex and they have been misinterpreted.[10] In essence, these arguments appear to be attempts to maintain the authority

7. Guest, *When Deborah Met Jael*, 111–56.

8. This pledge to be together "until death do them part" is called by West, "pronouncement, blessing, creed, hymn, poem, and declaration, offering paradigms for the ways in which we relate to one another in our comings and goings" (in Guest, *The Queer Bible Commentary*, 191).

9. Randall C. Bailey, "The Potiphar–Joseph–Ms. Potiphar Triangle: The Inter-se(x)(ct)ionality of Race/Ethnicity, Gender, Class, and Sexuality," paper presented at the annual meeting of the SBL, San Diego, Calif., November 17, 2007.

10. Cf. Peter J. Gomes, *The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart* (New York: William Morrow, 1996), 144–72, and Daniel A. Helminiak, *What the Bible Really Says about Homosexuality* (New Mexico: Alamo, 2000), for a list of the passages and this classical pro-LGBT treatment.

of the text and remain in the club, even if the cost is that of internalizing oppression. While all oppressed groups go through this syndrome, as witnessed by the impact of hetero-patriarchy on our readings, we can engage and struggle against these tendencies in interpretation.

In other words, much is at stake in posing queer readings, and both those from heterosexual and same gender loving camps are programmed to resist them, all in the name of holding heteronormativity the rule of reading. Given this resistance, we have to look at the heteronormative rules of reading and how these close off options to interpretation. In other words, posing same gender attraction as a factor in the relationship of characters in the narrative that motivates their behavior gets dismissed as impossible. On the other hand, in the course of this study we shall see from the secondary literature that there are several instances in which certain options for translating and interpreting ambiguous words or phrases are unanimously dismissed. It will be argued that to explore these options would seem to raise a plausible homoerotic meaning to the narrative. In these instances I shall explore the implications of reading differently.

By the same token, those who do look at male homoerotic possibilities in interpreting the text of Samuel, with the exception of Jennings,[11] try to feminize one of the men to keep the narrative within heteronormative understandings.[12] Accordingly, there are debates as to who is the top and who is the bottom, assuming that the one penetrated gives up his maleness and must be feminized. On the other hand, there are places where the narrator attributes behaviors and activities which are generally associated with one gender or the other, being attributed to a character of the opposite gender, such as David distributing cakes in 2 Sam 6:19, similar to Abigail in 1 Sam 25:19 and Tamar in 2 Sam 13:10. Thus, we shall have to explore whether this is the narrator's way of inscribing hetero-patriarchy as a means of working out the relationships and fictionalizing

11. Jennings, *Jacob's Wound*, 25–32.

12. Saul M. Olyan, "'Surpassing the Love of Women': Another Look at 2 Samuel 1:26 and the Relationship of David and Jonathan," in *Authorizing Marriage: Canon, Tradition, and Critique in the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions* (ed. Mark Jordan, Meghan Sweeney, and David Mellott; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 7–16, 165–70; Yaron Peleg, "Love at First Sight? David, Jonathan, and the Biblical Politics of Gender," *JSOT* 30 (2005): 171–89; Uri Wernik, "Will the Real Homosexual in the Bible Please Stand Up?," *Theology and Sexuality* 11, no. 3 (May 2005): 47–64; and Markus Zehnder, "Observations on the Relationship between David and Jonathan and the Debate on Homosexuality," *WTJ* 69, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 127–74.

gender or whether these are attempts to destabilize gender categories, as Butler would advocate.[13]

One advantage to this study, which makes it different from those constructing lesbian hermeneutics, is that it pays much more attention to men than to women in the biblical text. As Guest argues, one has to learn to read between the lines and to identify the ways in which the text only presents women explicitly in hetero-normative situations.[14] In the present study, the Hebrew text seems not to obscure possible homoerotic possibilities of interpretation, given the ways in which characters are described and plots are developed. The problem seems to enter at the level of translation, where translators choose translation options that obscure the possibility of either an erotic or same-gender friendly reading. In these instances I shall use the term "cover up translations."

Finally, the presence of these narratives in the "Holy Bible" sets the reader up to miss the possible ironic occurrences in the plot and to be so serious about interpreting what is happening that the comic elements in the plot get glossed over or missed by the modern reader. While the authors of these texts never intended them to be placed in a Bible, their current location in such a collection places parameters around intended interpretation by the canonizers. Thus, one of the contributions of deconstruction and queer theories is the reopening of these lines of reading and interpretation. One wonders whether the ancient readers chuckled at these occurrences in the texts which we read so stiltedly.

In this essay I wish to explore a narrative technique in which, rather than privileging the reader by giving the reader data that are not available to the characters in the narrative, the narrator withholds data from the reader until a strategic point of the narrative. These data are provided in what seem to be parenthetical notations, as if to say, ("Oh, yes, and by the way…"). Because these data are surprising, and in some cases embarrassing, the reader quickly reads on, either dismissing the data, or not stopping to explore their implications for the development of plot or characterization. One wonders whether one, upon reading these notes from the narrator, is supposed to backtrack and reread what has gone before. The tendency is to ignore this new fact and keep reading, but if one takes the data and brings them back to earlier narratives where the same behaviors occur, a new interpretation breaks forth. This is what I term "Reading Backwards." As Garsiel notes in comparing the secret anointings of Saul in 1 Sam 9–10 and of David in 1 Sam 16, "the reader

13. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 178–80.

14. Guest, *When Deborah Met Jael*, 111–42.

is compelled to 'reread' and engage in a fresh evaluation," with it becoming evident that what originally seemed a "fairly favorable" presentation takes on a new and ironic meaning.[15]

As will be argued here, the reader should stop, retreat, and re-evaluate the implications of the data in order to get a fresh look on what is being said, especially as regards what has previously been stated in the text. Given all that has preceded, it is clear that I am arguing that in the instances to be explored here, the data point to a same gender loving relationship between characters in the book of Samuel.

The attention to queer readings in the book of Samuel, with the exception of Jennings and Goss, has centered on David and Jonathan, with the reading that Jonathan was same gender oriented and David was going along with him, possibly for political gain or possibly for sexual attraction. The debates over whether *ʾahab*, the Hebrew verb usually translated as "love," should be seen as purely political and/or erotic continue, with scholars from both camps stressing that which best suits their ideological leanings.[16] Rather than engage this debate, I would like to focus on the interactions between Saul, David, and Samuel in 1 Sam 19 as a way of seeing how the narrative clues of "queerness" are there for exploration and re-reading.

The story really begins in 18:20 with the notice that Michal loves David. Saul decided to set a bride price of 100 Philistine foreskins, with the hope that in the process of David securing them that he would be killed by the Philistines. The narrator terms this plot a *moqesh*, "a trap" (v. 21). David exceeds the expectations and brings back 200 Philistine foreskins (v. 27), according to the Masoretic Hebrew text (MT), though most translators follow the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation, and say he only brought back 100 foreskins.

Given the rules of patriarchal readings, whenever men do something in the narrative, unless the narrator gives a negative signifier, their behavior is seen as rational and to be excused or accepted. Thus, the literary strategy of describing Lot (Gen 19:33–35) and Noah (Gen 9:21)

15. Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies and Parallels* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1990), 108.

16. For a classic discussion of the use of *ʾahab* in the David and Jonathan context, see P. Kyle McCarter, *I Samuel* (AB 8; New York: Doubleday, 1980), 342 n. 17, and the subsequent bibliography cited therein. For an alternative view, see Cart Comstock, *Gay Theology without Apology* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1993), 79–90. For a midpoint reading, see Ken Stone, "1 and 2 Samuel," in Guest, ed., *The Queer Bible Commentary*, 206–8.

as drunk is a cover for their engagement in incestuous behaviors.[17] Similarly, when Hannah is standing before the altar, with her lips moving and tears streaming down but no sound coming forth, Eli speculates that she is drunk (1 Sam 1:14). Even though her actions are not typical of drunkenness—she is not boisterous, staggering, vomiting—the tendency of my students is to rationalize Eli's speculation, as opposed to seeing these details demonstrating that he is incompetent. While Garsiel notes that Eli's statement to Hannah "testifies against Eli, who sees but does not comprehend," Campbell appears to be sympathetic to Garsiel's reading when he states: "Eli's response proves helpful. Hannah is gracious to the priest and changes her behavior."[18] Similarly, McCarter appears sympathetic to this character when he comments, "The tragedy of Eli… begins here as the old priest stolidly executes his office."[19]

So, when the narrator says Saul wants 100 foreskins for a bride price as a trap to get David killed, for the reader following the heteronormative rules of reading, this should be taken in a straight forward way. On the one hand, a way of interpreting circumcision in the Deuteronomic History is Josh 5:2–9, where it is presented as a ceremony of initiation into warrior status.[20] Thus, the repeated references to the Philistines as "the uncircumcised ones" in 1 Sam 17:26, 36; 31:4; and 2 Sam 1:20 could be a way of claiming that from the Israelite perspectives the Philistines were not true warriors because they were not able to sustain the pain of the operation of genital mutilation. Stone argues that since the Philistines came from the Aegean world, their not being circumcised made them stand out in their new location of ancient Israel. He further argues,

17. Cf. David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford Bible Series; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), especially their discussion of the narrator and description of characters, 52–63. In regard to these exact texts, cf. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (trans. John J. Scullion, S.J.; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 487–88, and *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary* (trans. John J. Scullion, S.J.; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 313.

18. Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel*, 36; Anthony F. Campbell, S.J., *1 Samuel* (FOTL 7; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 41.

19. McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 64.

20. While J. Alberto Soggin, *Joshua: A Commentary* (trans. R. A. Wilson; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), notes that this passage does initially connect the practice of circumcision to an initiation into puberty, which was picked up in Egypt, he quickly moves into arguing for covenantal understandings and a connection to the understandings of the "covenant of circumcision" found in Gen 17 and Exod 4:24–26. So also Trent Butler, *Joshua* (WBC 7; Waco: Word, 1983), 58–59.

> Thus, in an ancient world where military conflict already had phallic connotation, conflicts between Israelites and Philistines may well have been conceptualized partly as struggles to determine which sort of man—Israelite or Philistine, circumcised or uncircumcised—was really more manly.[21]

If so, perhaps the Israelite sense was "less is better." What is intriguing in this argument is Stone's claim that this is gendered discourse, but not that it is homocentric. Archaeological investigations of Philistine armaments, as well as the description of Goliath's attire in 1 Sam 17:4–7, do not suggest that the Philistines exposed themselves in battle. Thus, the focalization on the phallus speaks more to the erotic fantasies of the describer than to the descriptor.

On the one hand, the view of David as a warrior seems to guard the reader from the possibility of queering him in this regard. At best, given his decapitation of Goliath in 17:51, this genital mutilation in 18:17 could be another sadistic act of war on David's part. This would not be the last, instance of David being described as partaking in sadism in the war context, since 2 Sam 8:2 tells of David arbitrarily massacring two-thirds of the Moabites and v. 4 speaks of his hamstringing the horses. So, such a detail as gathering foreskins could be interpreted as just another one of David's excesses as a warrior.

On the other hand, David's continued reference to the Philistines as the "uncircumcised one(s)" could also be his way of discrediting them by sexualizing them and reducing them to their phalluses. The literary technique of denigrating one's opponents by sexualizing them has long been attested.[22] As Foucault has persuasively argued, the use of discourse around sexual labeling can be an instrument of power exertion.[23] Thus, the repeated epithet of "uncircumcised Philistine" becomes a trope of negative signification. In this way the Philistines get reduced to their genitals. In this way we see that the contexts of 1 Sam 17 and 31, and 2 Sam 1, are war narratives. Thus, the status of warrior seems to be at stake, more so than a view of the so-called "covenant community." In this regard it could also be a clue to Saul's and David's fixations with this part of the body. Or it could just not be multivalent. Or could this explain why LXX amends MT to be 100 Philistine foreskins?

21. Stone, "1 and 2 Samuel," 204.

22. Randall C. Bailey, "They're Nothing but Incestuous Bastards: The Polemical Use of Sex and Sexuality in Hebrew Canon Narrative," in *Reading From This Place*. Vol. 1, *Social Context and Biblical Interpretation in the United States* (ed. Fernando Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 121–38.

23. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. Vol. 1, *An Introduction* (trans. Robert Hurley; New York: Vantage, 1978), 92–102.

Regarding the bride price of 100 Philistine foreskins, Polzin states:

> If we are told that David was pleased with Saul's designation of a marriage gift (v. 26)—our only notice of David's feeling in the chapter apart from his responses of self-abasement in verses 18 and 23, which are clearly matters of form—we are still required to puzzle out why David is so pleased. Was it because, being poor, he was attracted by the opportunity both to purchase a marriage gift *with soft rather than hard currency and to give twice as much as required, thus impressing the king by again overwhelming the Philistines?* Whatever the reason for his pleasure here, we learn nothing else in the chapter about what is going on within David's soul. We know why Jonathan makes a covenant with David, but not how or why or even if David reciprocates at this point.[24]

In this statement one has to wonder whether Polzin is following the rules of heteronormativity and views of masculinity in not overtly speculating about of the activity as possibly being pleasing to David. Or is he speaking "tongue in cheek"? Gathering foreskins is multivalent. The humor in Polzin's statement, talking about "soft currency instead of hard," speaks volumes about Philistine foreskins as signifiers. While Campbell argues, "Here, the two hundred can be taken as an indication of overwhelming success," his not mentioning two hundred of what, seems to give clues that he is not considering any homoerotic implications of this scene.[25] Let me be clear, however, that I am not arguing that there is only one way of reading these texts or these data. Rather, I am arguing that closing off options is not the best avenue for meaningful exploration.

While Stone suggests that the foreskins as a bride price could be an attempt to feminize the Philistines by making their foreskins equivalent to women,[26] could it be that Saul knew that David was "into" foreskins? Could it be that David got so excited with the activity of amassing foreskins that he couldn't stop? One could almost imagine him counting, "76, 77, 78, What's that you are asking? Darn, I lost count. I'll have to start all over. Now, y'all be quiet now. One, two, three." Could it be that David knew Saul liked foreskins, for, indeed, the narrator tells us that Jonathan *hapes bᵉdavid mᵓod* (19:1). While the NRSV translates this phrase as "took great delight in David," it could also be translated "he desired David very much." In the speech of the servants to David about

24. Robert Polzin, *Samuel and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History; 1 Samuel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 178 (emphasis added).

25. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 197.

26. Stone, *Practicing Safer Texts*, 204.

the bride price we are told they said, *hapes bᵉka hammelek* (18:22), which the NRSV translates as "the king is delighted with you." One has to wonder whether this is the same type of *hps* to be found in Esth 2:14, where it is stated that the woman, after engaging the king sexually, would go back to the harem unless the king desired her (*hapes bah*). One sees that in this context of Esth 2, the phrase *hapes bᵉ*, "desires or delights in her," has a definite sexual meaning. Is it possible with this phrase also has an erotic meaning in 1 Sam 19:1, describing Jonathan's erotic desires for David. If so, once it is used with reference to Jonathan's feelings for David, the reader can *read backwards* and reinterpret the statement about Saul's feelings for David also being of a homoerotic nature. In so doing, one recalls that in 16:21, when David stands before Saul, the narrator tells the reader, "he loved him very much." Thus a contemporary translation of these statements of Jonathan and Saul's feelings for David could be "they had the hots for David." In other words, in Reading Backwards, one sees that there is more evidence for the claim of a homoerotic reading to the engagement between David and Saul around the bride price of Philistine foreskins.

Since that plan to kill David doesn't work, Saul tries to kill him at home but Michal, David's wife, Saul's daughter, thwarts that plan by showing herself to be a better planner and administrator than Saul. David, as any good military man would, flees and escapes from Saul and runs to Samuel. The reader must then ask: Why would David go to Samuel? Samuel, as Polzin correctly notes, is portrayed as a "scaredy cat" character.[27] He is afraid to tell Eli what YHWH says to him until Eli threatens him that unless Samuel tells him what was said, it will happen to Samuel (3:17). When YHWH tells Samuel in ch. 8 to give the people a king, he instead sends them home (8:22). In 16:1, when YHWH tells Samuel to go to anoint one of Jesse's boys as king, he is again presented as one who is afraid to do the will of YHWH. He states, "Saul will kill me," so YHWH devises a ruse—pretend to hold a sacrifice. So, why would David flee from Saul, who is trying to kill him, and go to the one who is afraid all the time?

If one speculates that he is seeking military refuge one would have to ask: What does Samuel as a character have to do with being a warrior? In ch. 7, when there is a war between Israel and the Philistines at Mizpah, Samuel prays for the people (7:8). This parody on charismatic leader tales in Judges does not present Samuel as a military leader. Instead, it notes that "As Samuel was offering up the burnt offerings" the Philistines started the battle. As Israel engages it, v. 11 states "the men of

27. Polzin, *Samuel*, 153.

Israel went out." It does not name Samuel in this engagement. By the same token, in chs. 13 and 15, Samuel always shows up after the fight or after the army has left. He is not a military leader. (Perhaps, to use a modern example, he is like someone who joins the US National Guard in order to avoid military service, but who then fails to show up—as a certain leader of the so-called Free World chose to do.) In other words, so far Samuel has been characterized as a scared individual who shies away from combat.

So, one must ask what there is in the previous relationship between David and Samuel that would suggest that David should flee to him. In so doing, one would have to go back to where they first met—the anointing in 1 Sam 16. In that chapter, as just noted, Samuel is told by YHWH to arrange a sacrifice, which will serve as a cover story for his going to Bethlehem. Asked by the leaders if he comes in peace, Samuel reassures them and said that they should sanctify themselves (*hisqadᵉshu*, v. 5a) for the sacrifice. Samuel then consecrates Jesse's sons for the sacrifice (16:5b). On the narrative level, the reader then expects to hear about the sacrifice—but the sacrifice never happens. In other instances of *hisqadesh*, "sanctify oneself," such as Josh 3:5 and 7:13, this verb is either preceded or followed by instructions to the priests to perform specific acts with the Ark. Similarly, in the parallel narrative of the secret anointing of Saul, there is a story of a sacrifice and sacred meal where Samuel has Saul presented with the leg he saved for him (9:22–24), takes Saul to his house, and the next morning anoints and kisses him and tells him not to tell any one what has happened (9:24–10:1). Thus, the use of the verb *qdsh* in the Hithpael, as well as the secret anointing of Saul, confirm the association of 1 Sam 16:6 with sacrifice. While Campbell addresses this by stating, "The sacrifice was a strategy to get Samuel safely to Bethlehem; once this is achieved, the sacrifice has no further purport,"[28] why does the narrator say that Samuel himself consecrates each of Jesse's boys? What exactly is involved in such "sanctification"? While there is no indication of change of setting, it appears that Samuel has gone to Jesse's house. By the same token, Polzin's speculation that David is poor seems counteracted by the status implied by Jesse's standing in the community.[29]

In 1 Sam 16:10, however, instead of there being a sacrifice, Jesse parades, *wayaʿaber*, his boys one at a time before Samuel. The use of the Hiphil (i.e. causative tense) means that Jesse is supervising this activity

28. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 163.

29. Polzin, *Samuel*, 173; Peter D. Miscall, *1 Samuel: A Literary Reading* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1980.

of having his sons parade before Samuel after he has sanctified them. As Polzin states, "'to make pass, to present,' is associated with the heart of the matter."[30] One has to wonder what religious/cultic service this is describing. The narrator gives the reader a clue since, YHWH has already told Samuel to stop looking at their appearance (v. 7). Evidently Jesse, unawares of this, keeps up the parade.

As the action continues, we "observe" Samuel, who keeps "seeing," or perhaps one might say "reading," these boys. Perhaps word has reached Jesse that Samuel likes looking at boys. Samuel's response to the parade is a repetitious, *bazeh*, "in *this one*," YHWH hasn't chosen (16:8–9). This designation, *bazeh*, is fairly dehumanizing and dismissive. It is as though Samuel says, "give me some more." By the same token, the possibility of Samuel liking boys is enhanced by Samuel's question, *hatammu hannaʿarim* (v. 11), literally, "Have the young boys finished?" To avoid our wondering why Samuel wants to see some more young boys, the English translators have him asking, "Are all your sons here?" Now how we got from "Have the young boys finished?" to "Are all your sons here?" is not a mystery. This is an example of what I earlier termed "cover up translation," where the translators translate in such a way to obfuscate sexual connotations to what is going on in the narrative. It does appear that Samuel is very disappointed. Is this because his mission is not accomplished, or is it that the parade has ended? While Garsiel sees Samuel's outburst as "Samuel's bewilderment…confounded," it could also, as I am suggesting, be seen as disappointment that the parade has ended.[31]

Once David appears, though YHWH makes the disclaimer that "humans see the eyes, while YHWH sees the heart" (16:7b), as soon as the narrator tells us how good looking David is (16:12b), YHWH jumps in and says, "That's him!," which is similar to YHWH's outburst when Samuel first sees Saul in 9:17. Given the unethical behavior of David in subsequent chapters, it must be the physical to which YHWH responds and not the interior. Gunn takes the statements about David's looks in 16:13 as "ironic" on the part of the narrator and fortuitous, since YHWH's speech in v. 7, "I look on the inside," is what YHWH really does.[32] Once again, given the rules of reading, YHWH has to be interpreted as consistent, even when the text points to inconsistencies in this character.

30. Polzin, *Samuel*, 161.

31. Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel*, 113.

32. David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (JSOTSup 14; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1984), 78.

So could it be that David knew that, though scared and non-military, Samuel would help him hide from Saul and that is why he flees to live with Samuel? It must be that he feels some sense of security, for while 19:18a begins with the narrator describing David as fleeing and escaping, the verse ends with his walking with Samuel and settling down. While Gunn points to the repetition and the swiftness of "to flee and to escape" in this and subsequent chapters (19:10, 12, 17, 18; 20:1, 29; 21:1, 11) and draws attention the use of *hlk*, "to walk," in 22:1 as slowing down the pace and giving a "sense of quiet consolidation"[33] in contrast to these verbs, he does not see the use of *hlk* and *yshb*, "to go" and "to settle," in 19:18 as signaling David's implied sense of safety in Samuel's presence. This is especially the sense, since the narrator uses the singular, *wayelek*, "and he went," followed by the compound subject, "he and Samuel", thereby suggesting very close association, followed by the plural *wayesh*ᵉ*bu*, "and they dwelt/settled, in *nayoth*."

Part of the problem in translating and interpreting this passage is figuring out what the narrator is saying by "they setted in *nayoth*." Though the Brown–Driver–Briggs lexicon (BDB) notes that *nayoth* could mean a house (627d), and though most commentators mention this, they follow the MT in its use of the definite article on the next noun, Ramah, and treat *nayoth* as though it were a proper noun, Naioth, signaling it as a suburb of Ramah.[34]

Saul heard David was at Naioth in Ramah. He sends three sets of messengers to get David and they end up in prophetic frenzy, *wayisnab*ᵉ*'u*. The narrator tells us that Samuel stands there watching this behavior (19:20). Saul then sends two more groups of emissaries to get David, but they also fall into prophetic frenzy. This threefold pattern is reminiscent of the threefold episode of calling Samuel's name in ch. 3.

Saul then comes looking for David and Samuel and he is told they are in Naioth in Ramah. Saul goes there and he also falls into prophetic frenzy (19:23). The narrator then tells us that Saul also stripped off his clothes, as did the others whom he had sent, and he rolled around naked all day with Samuel voyeuring. So, do we keep going or do we go back to assess what is going on with these men rolling around naked and Samuel watching and supervising this in the place where David has gone there to seek safety and where he feels secure? Could it be that *nayoth* does mean house and that David has fled not only from Saul, but also from Michal, and has set up house with Samuel? This is what makes

33. Ibid., 86.

34. Campbell, *1 Samuel*, 327; Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (trans. J.S. Bowden; OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 167.

McCarter's attempts at dealing with *nayoth* in 1 Sam 19 as a military camp most confusing.[35] When would the prophets be in such, and what about the portrayal of Samuel would make one think he would be in a military camp?

Gunn interprets the nakedness in ch. 19 as a signifier of Saul as diminished. As he states, "His helplessness before Samuel is marked symbolically by his nakedness." He even states that "Saul is reduced to *impotence* before Samuel by being thrown into an ecstatic frenzy."[36] There is a sense that these male exegetes see something which their phrasing bespeaks, but they just don't go there.

And do we just read backwards on this naked prophetic frenzy in this chapter or do we go back to where else it occurs in 1 Samuel? Why not keep going? In so doing we see that this happens in front of David in 18:10, where the NRSV states,

> The next day an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand…

It comes as not surprise to hear that this is another instance of "cover up translation." In fact it must be, because the translation doesn't say "he fell into prophetic frenzy," which is the phrase we are reading backwards. The phrase has been translated as "he raved", so let's just put our phrase, modified, back into the verse:

> The next day an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he *fell naked into a prophetic frenzy* within *the* house, while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand…

The next cover up is found in the phrase "playing the lyre." The Hebrew states *m'nagen b'yado*. As BDB (618d) translates the verb *ngn*, it means either "touch (strings), [or] play a stringed instrument." So perhaps one could translate it as "strumming." The problem here is that the word "lyre" is not found in the Hebrew. Instead the strumming is followed by the word "with his hand." So going back to our re-translation,

> The next day an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he *fell naked into a prophetic frenzy* within *the* house, while David was *strumming with his hand*, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand…

Finally, there are no personal pronouns in the final clause. Thus our re-translation is

35. McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 327.
36. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul*, 83 (emphasis added).

> The next day an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he *fell naked into a prophetic frenzy* within *the* house, while David was *strumming with his hand*, as he did day by day. *The* spear was in Saul's hand…

It's a good thing Freud never read this! Is this why the servants told David the king had the hots for him, as I discussed earlier? Is this why there is conflict between Saul and Jonathan in a struggle over David's attention? Is this why the 100 foreskin bride price made sense?

In returning to the narrative in 1 Sam 19:24, we left Saul rolling around naked before Samuel. The narrator then tells us, *ʿal ken*, "therefore [people] said/speculated," *hagam shaʾul bannᵉbiʾim*, which is commonly translated, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" As you could imagine, it could also be translated, "Is Saul also into the prophets?" Go figure.

Finally, in 1 Sam 20:1 we see that in 20:1 we see David treating Samuel like he treated Michal. He flees and doesn't go back to see him or her for the rest of 1 Samuel. Instead, he flees to Jonathan to find out, "What have I done?"

As pointed out earlier, while feminist hermeneutics has had to explore silences in the text and fill in gaps to reclaim the lives of women, queer male readings have only to do close readings of the text. The problem is that we have all been trained to read along with the canons of heteronormativity. Now, am I saying that a queer reading is the only possible reading of these texts? No. I am saying that such is a plausible reading. What creates difficulties in seeing that plausibility are the canons of reading, the cover-up translations, and histories of interpretations that turn us away from such possibilities. Similarly, the narrator's style of withholding data until late in the plot may cause us as readers to pause for a second on that scene, but we keep pushing forward into the plot. If, however, we take these clues and go backwards into the plot with these new data, we may come up with new readings and new possibilities of interpretation.

To be sure, the argument here is that these narrators may have been playful in constructing these plots and characterizations. By the same token, these characterizations could be negative signifiers. A discussion of this topic, however, will have to wait for another time.

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Part II

Canonizing David

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HEIR AND LAND: THE ROYAL "ENVELOPE" OF THE BOOKS OF KINGS

Walter Brueggemann

Whatever one concludes about the "historicity" of David and the United Monarchy, it is clear that David functioned in ancient Israel over time as a supple generative cipher in the ongoing interpretive process.[1] It is unmistakable, moreover, that David's significance for the interpretive process in ancient Israel is highly contested, as the several interpretive trajectories struggled to claim and utilize David in their particular interpretive enterprise. Specifically it is clear that there is ongoing contestation between the *Jerusalem traditions* that presented David and his dynasty with an absolute divine assurance and *the Deuteronomic traditions* that subordinated David to Torah, so that a Davidic future depended upon obedience to Torah.

I

The tension between these two interpretive traditions in the books of Kings has been masterfully articulated by Gerhard von Rad, and his model continues to govern interpretation, even in the face of subsequent

1. Questions of historicity concerning the United Monarchy are, at the present time, greatly unsettled. See the discussions of William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us About the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), and Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). Other recent important discussions of David that are not primarily concerned with historical questions include Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary on 1 and 2 Samuel* (New York: Norton, 1999); Steven L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Marti J. Steussy, *David: Biblical Portraits of Power* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999); and Robert Pinsky, *The Life of David* (New York: Schocken, 2005).

critical study of the books of Kings.[2] In his classic discussion, von Rad delineates the interpretive tension in a compelling way. On the one hand, the presentation of the Davidic house in this material concerns obedience to the commands of Deuteronomy:

> It is therefore the question concerning complete obedience that the Deuteronomist puts to the kings. This question of obedience is the first fundamental element in the Deuteronomistic presentation of the history. But alongside this subjective co-efficient, and continually corresponding to it, there now appears in Israel's history another, an objective one. We meet it when we enquire about the manner of the divine intervention in history. The Deuteronomist's conception is manifestly this: Jahweh revealed his commandments to Israel; in case of disobedience he threatened her with severe punishment, with the judgement of total destruction, in fact.[3]

To that end von Rad calls attention to the way in which David and his successors are reckoned to be Torah keepers (1 Kgs 3:3; 9:4; 11:4, 6, 33, 38; 14:8; 15:3, 11; 2 Kgs 14:3; 16:2; 18:3, 22:2).[4] But of course on two counts the claim for Davidic adherence to the Torah is not obviously sustainable. On the one hand, the verdict on subsequent kings, already beginning with Solomon (1 Kgs 11:9–10), compromised the claim of Davidic obedience to Torah. On the other hand, of course, the termination of the monarchy, as narrated in 2 Kgs 24–25, tells against full compliance to Torah.

For that reason, as von Rad recognized,[5] the historian must reckon with a second decisive factor in the hiddenness of the historical process, namely, "divine forbearance" that is linked to the promise made to David and his house:

> In the acceptance of this strong tradition the Deuteronomist has gone farthest from the theological rock whence he was hewn, namely Deuteronomy; and the large place which the Deuteronomist gives this tradition in his work shows that the Deuteronomic tradition had not been able to assert itself in all its purity. The Messianic cycle of conceptions, which was obviously very strong, had forced its way into it and made itself good.[6]

2. Gerhard von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy* (SBT 9; Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953), 74–91. See also his *Old Testament Theology I* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 334–47.
3. Von Rad, *Studies*, 77–78.
4. Ibid., 86–88.
5. Ibid., 84.
6. Ibid., 88–89.

Thus in von Rad's portrayal, divine judgment rooted in disobedience to Torah is a decisive historical fact with which to reckon. But finally more decisive is the divine promise that overrides the judgment. As is well known, von Rad must stake a great deal on the concluding paragraph of 2 Kgs 25:27–30:

> Thus there can be no doubt, in our opinion, that we can attribute a special theological significance to the final sentences of the Deuteronomist's work, the notice about the release of Jehoiachin from prison.[7]

Since von Rad, of course, there has been a surge of critical studies and the delineation of the text into quite distinct sources.[8]

In the discussion that follows, I wish to consider the canonical shape of the books of Kings by reference to the "envelop" that places Davidic reality at the beginning and at the end of the corpus. In this discussion, I offer a heuristic exercise, I hope befitting David Gunn's own playful heuristic capacity, by considering the relationship between the two texts that are not normally seen in relation to each other. We have learned, especially from Brevard Childs, to notice the canonical function of beginnings and endings of biblical materials, though concerning the books of Kings Childs does not argue from that angle.[9] While Childs arrives at his conclusion somewhat differently from the way in which von Rad argued, he accepts von Rad's reading as canonical and of course particularly accents the messianic promise:

> Without eliminating the historical features of David's chequered past, the Davidic traditions were cast in a messianic light by means of redactional shaping… In sum, von Rad's characterization of the Deuteronomist's ideal king is precisely that of the canonical David… [T]he stereotyped portrayal of David by the author of Kings as the model of the righteous

7. Ibid., 90.

8. See Anthony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien, *Unfolding the Deuteronomistic History: Origins, Upgrades, Present Text* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000); Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville, *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History* (Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 8; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000); Raymond F. Person, Jr., *The Deuteronomic School* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2002); Linda Schearing, ed., *Those Elusive Deuteronomists* (JSOTSup 268; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999); Johannes C. de Moor and Harry E. van Rooy, *Past, Present, Future: The Deuteronomistic History and the Prophets* (OTS 44; Leiden: Brill, 2000); Albert de Pury, Thomas Roemer, and Jean-Daniel Macchi, *Israel Constructs Its History: Deuteronomistic Historiography in Recent Research* (JSOTSup 306; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002).

9. Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 287–301.

> king is not to be regarded as an idiosyncratic idealization of one author, but rather reflects a common canonical stance which was grounded in a particular understanding of Israel's sacred literature and which was testified to in its shaping.[10]

II

It is my suggestion that the beginning promise of 1 Kgs 2:1–4 and the final paragraph of 2 Kgs 25:27–30 may be seen differently if they are drawn into close and provisionally intentional relation to each other.[11] The charge of David to Solomon in 1 Kgs 2:1–4 is, of course, clearly and unambiguously Deuteronomic, with its accent on "his statutes, his commandments, his ordinances, and his testimonies as written in the Torah of Moses" (2:3). Everything turns on Torah obedience. (The narrator is unembarrassed by the fact that immediately after this didactic statement there follows a fatherly instruction to purge the realm of enemies [2 Kgs 2:5–9]. Presumably the recommended acts of vengeance are proper retaliations and do not constitute bloodguilt or violation of the commandment.[12])

After the summons to obedience, David's programmatic statement to Solomon in 2:4 summarizes the condition of the divine promise according to Deuteronomic interpretation, a promise that will guarantee an *heir* to the dynasty:

> Then the Lord will establish his word that he spoke concerning me: "If your heirs take heed to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail you a successor on the throne of Israel." (1 Kgs 2:4)

The verse is, of course, structured in characteristic Deuteronomic fashion as an "if–then" whereby the "if" of Torah obedience is the prerequisite for a son, an heir, a successor to the throne. The guarantee of an heir and

10. Ibid., 293.

11. John Barton, "Dating the 'Succession Narrative'," in *In Search of Pre-exilic Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar* (ed. John Day; JSOTSup 406; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 95–106 (103), observes that this juxtaposition of texts is "almost comic."

12. Jan Jaynes Granowski, "Jehoiachin at the King's Table: A Reading of the Ending of the Second Book of Kings," in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Danna Nolan Fewell; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 178–79, alludes to the possibility of reading these two texts together, but does not pursue it but briefly. To my knowledge, that connection between the two texts has not been pursued elsewhere in contemporary scholarship.

successor is, of course, disputed in the tradition and given various nuance. In the primal promise of 2 Sam 7, the son is assured, though there the promise in the first instance concerns only Solomon:

> When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever. (2 Sam 7:12–16)

The son is guaranteed and the throne is "forever." To be sure, there will be punishment for Torah violation, but such punishment will never jeopardize the promise. The same claim concerning a son and heir is affirmed in the derivative statement of Ps 89:

> Forever I will keep my steadfast love for him,
> and my covenant with him will stand firm.
> I will establish his line forever,
> and his throne as long as the heavens endure.
> If his children forsake my law
> and do not walk according to my ordinances,
> if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments,
> then I will punish their transgression with the rod
> and their iniquity with scourges;
> but I will not remove from him my steadfast love,
> or be false to my faithfulness.
> I will not violate my covenant,
> or alter the word that went forth from my lips.
> Once and for all I have sworn by my holiness;
> I will not lie to David.
> His line shall continue forever,
> and his throne endure before me like the sun.
> It shall be established forever like the moon,
> an enduring witness in the skies. (Ps 89:28–37)

Again there is a conditional "if" in v. 31, but the "if" is quite penultimate. Punishment is allowed, but it never goes so far as to jeopardize the line which is guaranteed by divine promise.

The matter is of course different in Ps 132, a Psalm in which the Deuteronomic "if" now occupies a decisive position:

> The Lord swore to David a sure oath
> from which he will not turn back:
> "One of the sons of your body
> I will set on your throne.
> If your sons keep my covenant
> and my decrees that I shall teach them,
> their sons also, forevermore,
> shall sit on your throne." (Ps 132:11–12)

Here the "if" is not followed, as in 2 Sam 7:15 and Ps 89:33, by the "but" that makes the conditional "if" of only penultimate significance. In Ps 132, obedience to "my covenant" and "my decrees" guarantees the sons on the throne forever. The unstated but clearly implied negative counterpoint is that the line will fail with covenant obedience. This same ominous "if" is voiced in the second dream of Solomon with clear marks of Deuteronomic passion:

> If you turn aside from following me, you or your children, and do not keep my commandments and my statutes that I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut Israel off from the land that I have given them; and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight; and Israel will become a proverb and a taunt among all peoples. (1 Kgs 9:6–7)

It is important to note that the negative "then" in v. 7 is that Israel will be "cut off" from the land, a threat of displacement that does not necessarily mean the end of dynastic line. Except that in the positive counterpart of vv. 4–6, the royal throne is assured only with Torah compliance:

> Then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised your father David, saying, "There shall not fail you a successor on the throne of Israel." (1 Kgs 9:5)

The positive assurance of *a continuing line* and the negative threat *of removal from the land* are not at all commensurate. The difference likely reflects a sixth-century judgment in the midst of royal displacement but with an identifiable monarch still in purview.[13] The distinction is important, but both the threat to *the line* as well as to *the land* is on the horizon of the text. The sum of these texts evidences the dispute in Israel surrounding whether Torah obedience is defining for the gift of a royal heir.

13. See Jon D. Levenson, "The Last Four Verses of Kings," *JBL* 103 (1984): 353–61.

III

In light of this contestation about requirement and promise, the interpretation of 2 Kgs 25:27–30 has drawn much more scholarly attention than has 1 Kgs 2:1–4, no doubt because the text is an enigmatic one, and perhaps deliberately so. The sequence of influential interpreters from Martin Noth to Frank Cross is well known:

- Martin Noth read the end of the history as a statement of judgment and termination.[14]
- Gerhard von Rad, as already indicated, altered the critical conversation by taking vv. 27–30 as an abiding assurance, even with messianic overtones.[15]
- Hans Walter Wolff rejected both Noth's negative verdict and von Rad's focus upon promise. Rather, he stressed a summons to repentance and return to YHWH as condition for the future. His primary appeal is to other texts, so that he downplays this text to focus on texts where the motif of repentance is much more clear.[16]
- Frank Moore Cross has taken a mediating position, accepting with von Rad that the text is one of promise, but agreeing with Wolff on the theme of repentance. In the end, however, Cross sides with von Rad and the accent on promise: "At all events, Wolff has not given an adequate explanation of the persistent, and in many ways major, theme of the book of Kings: the promises to David. If Von Rad's handling of this theme is unconvincing, we are not thereby justified in ignoring it. The persistence of the Deuteronomistic stress upon the eternal decree of Davidic kingship cannot be explained as a survival of royal

14. Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: JSOT, 1981), 97–98.

15. Gerhard von Rad, *Studies in Deuteronomy*, 90–91. This perspective is seconded by Erich Zenger, "Die deuteronomistische Interpretation der Rehabitiliterung Jojachins," *BZ* 12 (1968): 16–30. Zenger observes that Evil-Merodach "spoke graciously" to the king, a contrast to 2 Kgs 25:6 wherein Nebuchadnezzar "spoke judgment" to Zedekiah. Zenger makes a great deal out of this contrast, though it is to be noted that the positive word to the king is not spoken by YHWH. It does necessarily follow that this is to be taken as YHWH's action and therefore to be understood with theological intentionality, as the text makes no such claim.

16. Hans Walter Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Deuteronomic Historical Work," in *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions*, by Walter Brueggemann and Hans Walter Wolff (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 86.

> ideology taken over mechanically from monarchist sources. It *must* be pertinent to the Deuteronomistic theology of history."[17]

The text has been so much studied that the interpretive options have largely been spelled out. One's interpretive conclusion will likely fall within this range of opinion. Here I consider only what opens in our reading if we place this ending text alongside the beginning text of 1 Kgs 2:1–4. That earlier text makes Torah obedience the condition of an heir and of the continuation of the throne. For the most part, readers of 2 Kgs 25:27–30 regard the change of clothes and welcome to the emperor's table as signs of a changed status for the Israelite king and a recognition that the Davidic monarchy is still in tact and acknowledged, whereby Jews may continue to count on that prop for political-communal identity. Jon Levenson goes further, finding in the formulation of the text the establishment of a covenant between the Babylonian ruler and the Israelite king:

> To strike a covenant with Jehoiachin undoubtedly served Evil-Merodach's interests. In exchange for recognition of the Judean's royal status, the emperor would have received the latter's support, which would prove beneficial in retaining the loyalty of the exiles, in insuring the continued pacification of their homeland, and, if an analogy with Elephantine be in order, in securing faithful Judean service of a military nature.[18]

This much would seem to be clear enough.

If, however, we read the text alongside 1 Kgs 2:1–4, we are pressed to other matters. That anticipatory statement of David, of course, does not focus upon changed clothes or changed status or admission to the imperial table, all of which may be celebrated. It focuses rather on an heir, on the continuation of the Davidic line beyond Jehoiachin. And here the text of 2 Kgs 25:27–30 is noticeably silent. It has nothing to say about what comes next, about any heir after Jehoiachin. The silence of the text is not noticeable, nor likely important, except for the statement of 1 Kgs 2:1–4 that makes the issue prominent, of course, along with 2 Sam 7, Ps 89, and Ps 132. Alongside that sequence of texts, we notice the silence of our text. Perhaps the traditionists who give us those final four verses did not know. Or perhaps they did not want to say. Or perhaps, more directly, they wanted to refuse to say. The question posed by

17. Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 278.

18. Levenson, "The Last Four Verses in Kings," 357.

this cluster of promises is: Did Jehoiachin have an heir? The question can, of course, be taken as a historical one; on historical grounds there is good evidence of a son to come after him, perhaps to keep the dynastic claim in place.[19]

IV

But our question is not a historical one. As David is a cipher for generative interpretation, we may take Jehoiachin, in the wake of 1 Kgs 2:1–4, as a cipher to serve the question of heir and the continuation of the throne. In order to appreciate the interpretive imagination mobilized around the figure of Jehoiachin, we may turn to texts in the prophetic traditions. We do so, first of all, with reference to Jeremiah. We may move to the traditions of Jeremiah on two grounds, first the general affinity between Deuteronomic thought and the traditions of Jeremiah, and second because the same notation concerning Jehoiachin is reiterated in Jer 52:31–34. It is clear that the developing tradition of Jeremiah, like the traditionists in Kings, has an acute interest in Jehoiachin as he counted for the future of the displaced community. In Deuteronomic thought Jehoiachin stands under divine judgment (2 Kgs 24:9). Thus the question of his future is an open one, whether the judgment of Torah or the dynastic promise will prevail. In addition to Jer 52:31–34, we may pay attention to three texts in Jeremiah that bear upon Jehoiachin and his putative heirs.

First, in Jer 22:28–30, the text that sent me on this heuristic venture, Jehoiachin (Coniah) is grieved because he has been cast away from the land. In v. 29, the land is grieved for it is to suffer greatly by divine judgment. And then in v. 30, a verdict rendered on Jehoiachin and a sentence are pronounced:

> Thus says the Lord:
> Record this man as childless,
> a man who shall not succeed in his days;
> for none of his offspring shall succeed
> in sitting on the throne of David,
> and ruling again in Judah. (Jer 22:30)

This verse would seem to be a direct and final response to the warning of David in 1 Kgs 2:2–4. He will be "childless" because of his "dire evil." And yet, as Hans-Jürgen Hermisson has observed, the judgment is not

19. See 1 Chr 3:17–18, and the summary discussion of John M. Berridge, "Jehoiachin," *ABD* 3:662–63.

simply that he will lack a son, but that he will lack an heir to *sit on the throne of David* (presumably in Jerusalem), one *to rule again in Judah*.[20] The text may anticipate that he will be heirless, though the term rendered "childless" is uncertain;[21] rather, the prospect is that in time to come his heirs will not rule in Jerusalem or in Judah. Thus the poetic lament does not confirm the Davidic anticipation of 1 Kgs 2:1–4 that disobedience leads to the lack of an heir. The defeat concerns not the *heir* but the *land*.

Second, in Jer 13:18 there is another prophetic anticipation of judgment and the loss of power and splendor:

> Say to the king and the queen mother;
> "Take a lowly seat,
> for your beautiful crown
> has come down from your head."

The last line of v. 19 indicates that the sanction is not one of death but of exile, with the term *glh* used repeatedly. In agreement with 22:28, the royals are to be banished into exile.

I have learned of the import of these two texts from Hermisson. But now, in an interpretive stretch, I venture beyond his analysis to consider a third text, Jeremiah's famous letter to the exiles. It is instructive that our same king, Jehoiachin (Jeconiah), and the queen mother (see 13:18) are mentioned in the introduction to the letter (29:2). The text does not say that the letter is addressed to the deported king, but such an address is credible. Two matters are of note if we entertain for now that the letter is addressed to the very king that the tradition of Jeremiah has grieved in 22:28–30. First, the king is urged to promote the *shalom* of Babylon as the only possible ground of Jewish *shalom* (v. 7). I have already mentioned Levenson's conclusion that the recognition of Jehoiachin by the Babylonians had "undoubtedly served Evil-Merodach's interests."[22] That recognition by the empire was a certain way to assure the empire of Jewish support. Thus the king, by being seen in public with the emperor, brought an important constituency to the support of the empire and was thereby an asset for a peaceable order, thus "the shalom of the city." Second, in v. 6 the king is commended…along with the community…to "bear sons and daughters," in order that the community should "multiply and not decrease." Of course, the text does not treat explicitly of royal

20. Hans-Jurgen Hermisson, "Jeremias Wort uber Jejachin," in *Werden und Wirken des Alten Testaments: Festschrift fur Claus Westermann zum 70. Geburtstag* (ed. Rainer Albertz et al.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 253–66.

21. See Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1–24* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 553 n. 153.

22. Levenson, "The Last Four Verses in Kings," 357.

heirs; if, however, sons and daughters are anticipated and the king is among the addressees, surely the admonition is to produce royal heirs for a time to come, albeit a time to come in Babylon.

When drawn into the service of Jer 52:31–34, these three texts (Jer 13:18–19; 22:28–30; 29:6–7) suggest a preoccupation with the status of Jews…and the royal line…*in Babylon under Babylonian aegis* and perhaps surveillance. The harshness of judgment against the king and the depth of lament over Jehoiachin in Jeremiah concern not loss of throne or of heir, but loss of land.[23] These several texts, and surely 2 Kgs 25:27–30 with them, function to recognize Davidic kingship in a context of displacement. Or with Levenson:

> We conclude, then, that 2 Kgs 25:27–30 represents part of an effort by an exilic Deuteronomistic source to bring the legacy of the promissory covenant with David into line with the new historical reality effected by the events of 587 B.C.E. and with the novel social and political situation of the continuing Diaspora.[24]

The sum of these texts in Jeremiah indicates that for Jehoiachin and his community, the deportation is real and the rule of Babylon is decisive.[25] There may be a future for the king…and even for his sons after him?—but only far way in a land "that you do not know." This conclusion of *king but no land* recognizes the new situation for the displaced community. (It also indicates why scholarship has found the Jehoiachin passage beyond simple resolution.) The ambiguity of the text reflects the ambiguous destiny of the displaced king and his dynastic enterprise.

V

Because there may be, not certainly but perhaps, a future for Jehoiachin and the Davidic line, I will consider, beyond the obvious connection of Kings and Jeremiah, two other textual clusters that may relate to and illuminate our two texts in Kings. First, in the book of Isaiah it is well known that the concluding oracle of Isaiah to Hezekiah in Isa 39:6–7

23. On the theme of land in Jeremiah, see my early discussion, Walter Brueggemann, "Israel's Sense of Place in Jeremiah," in *Rhetorical Criticism: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (ed. Jared Jackson and Martin Kessler; Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series 1; Pittsburgh: Pickwick, 1974), 149–65, and more fully Peter Diepold, *Israels Land* (BWANT 5/15; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1972).

24. Levenson, "The Last Four Verses in Kings," 361.

25. In Jer 24, the affirmation of "the good figs," the community gathered around Jehoiachin, move in v. 6 to anticipate a return to the land. That anticipation, however, goes beyond the purview of the texts I am considering.

anticipates that the royal sons will be taken to Babylon and made eunuchs in the service of the state.[26] Such a fate would, of course, ensure that there would be no continuing royal line.

In light of that declaration, I wish to reflect upon Isa 54–56 as an act of high rhetoric and high hope for a community brought to the brink of hopelessness:

- In Isa 54, there is a promise of sons to be the barren (v. 1). The reference is clearly to the ancestral narratives of Genesis and the prospect of sons as an opening to the future when there was no ground for hope. Of course, the text does not mention the royal family; but if the text is drawn close to the grief of the royal family reflected, for example, in Jer 22:28–30, then the promise takes on fresh power as perhaps a promise to the royal family.
- In Isa 55:3, moreover, the divine promise to the Davidic house is reiterated, a reference that might strengthen the royal reference in ch. 54.[27]
- In Isa 56, the beginning of so-called Third Isaiah, there is a welcome home for eunuchs who keep covenant and practice sabbath, that is, who obey Torah. Since this is the only other use of the term "eunuch" (*srys*) in the Isaiah tradition, a reference back to Isa 39 is thinkable. If a linkage between ch. 39 and ch. 56 can be entertained, then a welcome to what remains of the royal family may be heard in ch. 56. The juxtaposition of welcome in ch. 56 and a promise of sons in ch. 54, moreover, indicate that YHWH, in fidelity to the promise of "steadfast sure love for David" (55:3), may now enact the impossible, that sons and daughters may be borne that the line may multiply (Jer 29:6).

The Ezekiel tradition likewise bears upon the future of the house of David:

26. For a general discussion of Isa 39, see Christopher R. Seitz, *Zion's Final Destiny: The Development of the Book of Isaiah; A Reassessment of Isaiah 36–39* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 182–91. Neither Seitz nor Childs draw the text into relation with ch. 56 as I suggest here.

27. I am, of course, aware that Otto Eissfeldt, "The Promises of Grace to David in Isaiah 55:1–5," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 196–207, has proposed that the promise to David in this chapter is transposed from the king and dynasty to the community in general; in this, moreover, Eissfeldt has been widely followed. This may be correct, but my reading of chs. 54–56 all together suggests that we may not dismiss the dynastic specificity of the verses too lightly.

> In Ezek 17:16–21, a harsh verdict is pronounced against Zedekiah who violated his treaty with Babylon. But then, in verses 22–24, there will be a "sprig" that will be planted in order to be fruitful. The reference is likely to Jehoiachin who will be established by YHWH: "Just as the exiles as a group represented the key to Israel's future as a nation, so the hopes of the Davidic house were pinned on Jehoiachin. This man, who had gone into exile at the age of eighteen, stripped of all honor, would be rehabilitated."[28] The provision that he would "bear fruit" surely anticipates a continuing Davidic line from him.

The reference to the "third generation" in Ezek 18:19–20 of course does not mention the royal family. It only asserts that the new generation, the third, may be free of the punishment evoked by the second generation.[29] If we take the three generations as a royal reference, the sequence, of course, is Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Jehoiachin. In 2 Kgs 24:9, as noted, Jehoiachin did what was evil. Thus the young king in that characterization does not fit the requirement of Ezek 18 except that Deuteronomic theology allows for the very repentance called for by Ezekiel.[30] The text does not go so far, and that may be too much from silence. In Ezek 34:23–24, in what is likely an intrusive notation, the Davidic king is still expected in time to come.[31]

This cluster of texts from Jer 29:5–6; Isa 54–56, and Ezek 17:22–24; 18:19–20, and 34:23–34 altogether suggests that the future, in important strands of the tradition, pivoted on Jehoiachin as the primal character

28. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*, 553.

29. See the splendid discussion of this chapter by Paul Joyce, *Divine Initiative and Human Response in Ezekiel* (JSOTSup 51; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989), 333–60.

30. The summons of ch. 18 is very close to the Deuteronomic accent so well articulated by Hans Walter Wolff; for the latter part of the book of Ezekiel, Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Can These Bones Live? The Problem of the Moral Self in the Book of Ezekiel* (BZAW 301; New York: de Gruyter, 2000), has shown that the future does not depend upon repentance but is a gift of divine initiative. That, however, is not on the horizon of the texts I have considered. Christopher T. Beggs, "The Significance of Jehoiachin's Release: A New Proposal," *JSOT* 36 (1986): 49–56 (51), rightly notes that here is no mention of royal repentance. Beggs's conclusion is that the report of the release, without mention of YHWH and without theological intentionality, is a human act to be understood in terms of imperial policy and/or the pro-Babylonian stance of the tradition. He observes, against von Rad, moreover, that the imperial rehabilitation, as far as we are told, is limited to this king and makes no reference to a continuing dynastic claim.

31. The probability that these two verses have something of Jehoiachin in purview is supported by the awareness that the entire dating system of the book of Ezekiel derives from the deportation of Jehoiachin in 598. Time begins for this prophetic tradition with the arrival of that king in Babylon.

concerning the durable promises to David. But the scope and intent of those promises are radically reshaped in light of the loss of the land, a loss that necessarily subverts older renditions of the promise.

The other text to be mentioned is the note of realism in Ps 89:38–51 that acknowledges the failure of the dynasty and the voiding of the promises of YHWH:

> But now you have spurned and rejected him;
> you are full of wrath against your anointed.
> You have renounced the covenant with your servant;
> you have defiled his crown in the dust…
> Lord, where is your steadfast love of old,
> which by your faithfulness you swore to David? (Ps 89:38–39, 49)

This text tells against making too much of Jehoiachin or a way forward through him.

VI

In light of these several texts indicating interpretive ferment in the period of the final form of 1 and 2 Kings, we return to the envelop of Kings in 1 Kgs 2:1–4 and 2 Kgs 25:27–30. If we read from the instruction of David, the books of Kings are primally concerned with heirs to the throne. The narrative of Kings concerns a succession of Davidic heirs; the story presses always forward to the next heir who might keep covenant. But before the tradition of Deuteronomy focuses on royal heirs, the promise is about land and its jeopardy (Deut 8:18–20; 30:20). It is possible, then, to distinguish the gift of royal heir and a secure land given in promises. As we have seen, the Deuteronomic formula of 1 Kgs 9:4–7 makes the positive promise for Torah obedience *an heir*:

> Then I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised your father David, saying, "There shall not fail you a successor on the throne of Israel." (1 Kgs 9:5)

At the same time, it makes the negative threat for Torah violation not loss of heir but *loss of land*:

> Then I will cut Israel off from the land that I have given them; and the house that I have consecrated for my name I will cast out of my sight; and Israel will become a proverb and a taunt among all peoples. (1 Kgs 9:7)

In the end, the story of the monarchy in Kings is about *land loss* and *retention of royal office* through Jehoiachin. This judgment is congruent with that of Levenson, that the literature reflects a coming to terms with

the new landless situation in which the *shalom* of the community is dependent upon and derivative from the *shalom* of the imperial city of Babylon (Jer 29:7).

But that finally leaves the question: Is a *king* without *land a king*? Heirs are nowhere on the horizon of 2 Kgs 25:27–30, and we do not know from this text about such a future—and nor did the traditionists who provided this intriguing paragraph. What we do know is that even if the line runs beyond this king, it does so without the benefit of Torah obedience. Jehoiachin and his generation must still answer,

- for the defining Torah violation of David: "Nevertheless for David's sake the Lord his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem, setting up his son after him, and establishing Jerusalem" (1 Kgs 15:4).
- for the overwhelming negations of Manasseh: "Still the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him. The LORD said, 'I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel; and I will reject this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there'" (2 Kgs 23:26–27).
- for the negative verdict given on Jehoiachin himself: "He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, just as his father had done" (2 Kgs 24:9).

Heirs may be given. The land may eventually be restored. But the king and all those with him must be haunted by the lament of the Psalm:

> Lord, where is your steadfast love of old,
> which by your faithfulness you swore to David? (Ps 89:49)

It is a lament that lives very close to the landless Jehoiachin:

> O land, land, land,
> hear the word of the Lord! (Jer 22:29)

This analysis by way of intertextual references seeks to pay attention to nuance and trace and hint and gap, the detailed and playful notices David Gunn has taught us so well to notice. Taken in this way, the over-simple theological verdicts variously rendered by Martin Noth, Gerhard von Rad, Hans Walter Wolff, Frank Moore Cross, et al., are too cold and abstract, with cognitive certitudes in one direction or another that move beyond the permits of the text. The text rather offers us unsettled openness that our scholarship should not settle. As the young king was resituated at the imperial table, he still did not know of his future. If he was a

good traditionist, he might have been asking the question already asked of the father of all heirs and all land, the question that hangs heavy over this tradition: "Is anything too wonderful for the Lord? At the set time I will return to you, in due season, and Sarah shall have a son" (Gen 18:14).[32]

By the sixth century, it seems clear that *Jehoiachin* had displaced *David* as a primary cipher for interpretive dispute concerning Israel's future. David, of course, lingers definitively in the background. But the texts I have cited in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel point to Jehoiachin in various ways and indicate that he came to occupy a central place in Israel's contested imagination. Around him, in anticipation, swirl the questions of the future concerning *heir, land, and landless heir.*

I suggest that the normative scholarship in the wake of von Rad that I have cited has focused much too tightly upon one-dimensional questions of authorial intent. Such explanatory interpretation tends to foreclose what must be kept open. It must be kept open because the future in the sixth century was open, and because the God moving in that future (albeit absently in the last paragraph) is not to be so readily determined. Thus the move from the contested metaphor of David to the contested metaphor of Jehoiachin requires an indeterminate reading, the kind reflected elsewhere, for example, in Job 42:1–6.[33] Our habitual disputes over the final paragraph reflect a concern for determination that runs, I suspect, against the grain of the text.

32. See Walter Brueggemann, "'Impossibility' and Epistemology in the Faith Tradition of Abraham and Sarah [Genesis 18:1–15]," *ZAW* 94 (1982): 615–34.

33. On that verse, see Jack Miles, *God: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1995), 425 n. 324.

A Broken Hallelujah: Remembering David, Justice, and the Cost of the House

Danna Nolan Fewell

> Where national memories are concerned, griefs are of more value than triumphs, for they impose duties, and require a common effort.
>
> —Ernest Renan[1]

> No life ever was more like a tale than David's, but it too spends itself like a narrative trickling or unwinding away into God's eternity, in whose wrath we pass away our days.
>
> —Robert Pinsky[2]

A Broken Hallelujah

Endings, especially unsatisfactory ones, have a way of prompting beginnings, often uncertain ones that rummage for, rather than confidently assert, meaning. This is something that both the Bible and those who teach and write about the Bible know painfully well. As it so happens, it is also the condition of this essay.

The first unsatisfactory ending: the fall of 2006, a seminar entitled "The Books of Samuel and the Politics of Representation."[3] Seventeen of us had spent an entire semester (and part of the previous summer) journeying through Samuel and 1 Kings with the biblical David. We went into battle with him. We fled through the wilderness with him. We swooned

1. The original lecture, "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?," was delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11, 1882. It was subsequently published in *Oeuvres Complètes*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1947–61), 887–907. This quote was taken from Martin Thom's translation, found in *Nation and Narration* (ed. Homi K. Bhabha; London: Routledge, 1990), 8–22.
2. Robert Pinsky, *The Life of David* (New York: Schocken/Nextbook, 2005), 182.
3. Credit for the ingenious title goes to Jione Havea.

to his music. We listened to his public speeches. We eavesdropped on his private conversations. We watched him watch Bathsheba. We read his confidential notes to Joab. We endured the spectacle of his dysfunctional family. We fled Jerusalem with him. We witnessed him shivering, duped, and dooming his enemies on his deathbed.

We also became intimate with many post-biblical Davids—the Davids of plays, novels, poetry, art, and film. In the end, none of us liked David very much. Nor were we much enamored with any of the other characters in David's story.[4]

Now, after twenty-odd years in this profession, I (like most readers of this volume) have long since lost my naiveté about biblical characters. Liking them is no longer a requirement, or even a possibility in many cases, for studying them. But for many of my students, this intellectual and emotional investment in a character and a text that ultimately disappointed was a profound loss of innocence. Seasoned and unseasoned readers alike were left grieving over the biblical story and uncertain about its meaning. If the story of David could have been told differently, as Chronicles and post-biblical retellings so clearly attest, then why was the story in Samuel told the way it was?

Granted, it had been a more interesting read than either Chronicles or the anemic versions we had all learned as children, but though riveting and intriguingly indeterminate, the narrative left us cold comfort. Why would a society tell *this* story about its past? We were much too savvy to think it driven by historical accuracy.[5] Nor did "preservation of tradition" suffice, since the Chronicler's amnesia divulged that certain traditions are easily and conveniently forgotten. "Politics" intimated only part of the truth. Classifications such as "political propaganda" or "political commentary" or "political etiology," helped us shed our naiveté but couldn't always account for the persistent ambiguities and ironies. What purpose(s) could this story have served, either on its own or in the context of the "mostly Deuteronomistic" story stretching from Genesis to Kings? And what purpose could it possibly serve now?

4. With the exception of Jonathan. There was a heightened empathy for Jonathan in the class, but, with the guidance of our classmate Cynthia Rogers, we became aware of the problems inherent in holding Jonathan up as a model to be emulated in contemporary religious communities. The propensity to present Jonathan and David as a paradigm of ideal friendship, especially to children, ignores the personal, social, and political costs to Jonathan that friendship with David incurs.

5. See Joel Rosenberg's select catalogue of historical critics who have considered this an "eye witness report" (*King and Kin: Political Allegory in the Hebrew Bible* [Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1986], 100).

We ended our semester-long conversation with Leonard Cohen's song "Hallelujah":[6]

> Now I've heard there was a secret chord
> That David played, and it pleased the Lord
> But you don't really care for music, do ya?
> It goes like this—the fourth, the fifth
> The minor fall, the major lift
> The baffled king composing Hallelujah…

We listened, immersed in intertextual contemplation and conjecture, as Cohen's gravelly voice fused David with Samson and Bathsheba with Delilah:

> Your faith was strong but you needed proof
> You saw her bathing on the roof
> Her beauty and the moonlight overthrew you
> She tied you to a kitchen chair
> She broke your throne, and she cut your hair
> And from your lips she drew the Hallelujah…

Then we shared the existential angst of Jeff Buckley's more passionate lament:[7]

> Well, maybe there's a God above
> But all I've ever learned from love
> Was how to shoot somebody who outdrew ya
> It's not a cry that you hear at night
> It's not somebody who's seen the light
> It's a cold and it's a broken Hallelujah…

We even listened to John Cale's version in the soundtrack to *Shrek*. There the song reverberates through an enchanted land where tall, dark, handsome princes aren't so tall or so handsome and are all too willing to blackmail others into doing the risky, dirty work of fighting dragons and rescuing princesses. Curiously, we found here a corrective for Samuel's version: in *Shrek*'s world princesses wisely opt to live with ogres in the swamp rather than become palace ornaments in tidy, well-fortified, kingdoms. If only Michal had had such options….

While listening to the haunting strains (*Hallelujah, hallelujah, it's a cold and it's a broken hallelujah…*), we considered David on his deathbed, pitifully cold, impotent, muddled, and manipulated, giving his suspect successor Solomon last minute deuteronomistic instructions to

6. Thanks to the brilliant suggestion of my colleague Heather Elkins. The song was first recorded on Cohen's 1984 album *Various Positions*.

7. Recorded on his 1994 album *Grace*.

walk in the ways of YHWH—and then capping them off with his personal hit-list (an exemplary lesson, if ever there was one, in *how to shoot somebody who outdrew ya*). The song, for all its excessive allusion, epic length, and multiple versions, seemed to have caught the tenor of the text just right: the story of David, as told in Samuel, is a cold and broken Hallelujah.[8]

We left David's bedside with much of the chill and perhaps some of the anger that had pervaded the end of *Gender, Power, and Promise*, a study of the "non-subjects" of Genesis through Kings that David Gunn and I had undertaken several years ago.[9] Our monograph had closed with the much-debated, enigmatic ending to the Deuteronomistic History. After having witnessed the story's violence against women, children, strangers, slaves, and the common people in general, we had expressed impatience with the customary question of whether the release of King Jehoiachin signaled pessimism or hope: "Why should we care?" Why should we care about this particular king or the Davidic dynasty, when the history had so pointedly neglected to tell us what had happened to all the others who had been affected by the theological dispositions, political decisions, and personal ambitions of the powerful? "In the thirty-seventh year of the exile," while Jehoiachin was eating from the Babylonian king's table, where were the women and children who had watched Jerusalem burn, who had witnessed the deaths and disappearances of their family members, who had found themselves deported or left abandoned among the cinders?

Hence, we come to a second problematic ending provoking this beginning—the unsettling close of Genesis to Kings and its intimation of a traumatized remnant remembering and mourning its past.

Storytelling and Survival

Cultural theorists observe that shared narratives, by preserving memory and fostering hope, constitute and sustain community.[10] According to philosopher David Carr,

8. Reaffirmed for me was David Jobling's observation long ago that the Deuteronomistic History is, above all other things, a document of grief. See also the way he weaves the themes of tragedy and loss in his commentary *1 Samuel* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998).

9. Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).

10. This observation has been made by numerous critics in fields as varied as literary criticism, philosophy, psychology, and the social sciences. To name but a few: Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic, 1973);

> A community…exists by virtue of a story which is articulated and accepted, which typically concerns the group's origins and its destiny, and which interprets what is happening now in the light of these two temporal poles. Nor is the prospect of death irrelevant in such cases, since the group must deal not only with possible external threats of destruction but also with its own centrifugal tendency to fragment… [T]he narrative function…renders concerted action possible and also works toward the self-preservation of the subject which acts. Indeed, we must go even further and say that it is literally *constitutive* of the group… [N]arration, as the unity of story, storyteller, audience, and protagonist, is what constitutes the community, its activities, and its coherence in the first place.[11]

When we envision a social group both under "external threat" and susceptible to internal fragmentation, we might imagine a community that has been conquered, occupied, and/or colonized—conditions that call for delicate strategies of representation and narration. The threat of imperial persecution necessitates diplomacy, compromise, irony, indeterminate references, and "writing between the lines."[12] How does one tell a "constitutive" story that retrieves heritage, reinscribes cultural identity, ensures survival, *and also* resists the political forces that limit the community's autonomy?

Trauma also presents its own peculiar challenges to coherent story telling. Psychologists and psychoanalysts consistently remind us of the relationships between the kinds of stories we tell about ourselves and the kinds of suffering we experience. When catastrophe interrupts the life narrative an individual imagines herself to be living, or the historical trajectory a community has constructed for itself, the result is what one

Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986); David Carr, *Time, Narrative, and History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Barbara Johnstone, *Stories, Community, and Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); and the studies included in George Rosenwald and Richard Ochberg, eds., *Storied Lives: The Cultural Politics of Self-Understanding* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), and Lewis P. Hinchman and Sandra K. Hinchman, eds., *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997).

11. David Carr, "Narrative and the Real World: An Argument for Continuity," in Hinchman and Hinchman, eds., *Memory, Identity, Community*, 7–25 (20). We might compare David Jobling's description of the Deuteronomistic History as a text that "continues to urge the past as meaningful," that "claims that what the past records about such figures [as judges and kings and prophets] is of critical importance in creating the sense of identity needed to live in the present" (*1 Samuel*, 256).

12. See Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1952); James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

theorist has labeled "narrative wreckage," where the present is no longer "what the past was supposed to lead up to, and the future is scarcely thinkable."[13] One possible constructive response to narrative wreckage is to take stock of what survives, and from those remains, to begin to reconstruct a different story that attempts to repair and reorder the self or the community. It is important, however, that the reconstructed narrative speak the truth about the critical nature of the interruptive suffering and its continuous impact on a story that may no longer presume an auspicious ending.

Mourning accompanies and colors such narrative renovations. The "wounded storyteller" mourns what has been lost and attempts to explain and make sense of the trauma. When a trauma has been particularly devastating, the explanations often involve an admission of guilt or responsibility even when the survivors had in no way been culpable. Assuming guilt gives survivors the illusion of some control. Rather than face the shame of utter vulnerability, we tend to admit fault, to suppose that our behavior or attitudes were a contributing factor to our suffering. By believing such, we imagine that, should such a situation arise again, we would be able to prevent or change the outcome.[14]

Although its strategies of resistance to empire are subtle and have yet to be explored fully, the primary story in Genesis to Kings is a "constitutive story" that weaves political critique into its telling through its constantly slipping signifiers of empire.[15] Sometimes the signifiers are associated with outsiders and enemies, making the association more obvious (e.g. Babel, Eglon/Moab, Sennacherib/Assyria, Nebuchadnezzar/Babylon); sometimes they are embodied in insiders and thus less apparent to imperial eyes. The story's preoccupation with past trauma is borne out, not only by its ending, but by its reiterated themes, writ large and small, of exile, exodus, violence, victories, defeats, and barely surviving remnants. As a story that begins and ends with exile, it is rife with guilty rationalizations about how the exile came about. The most prominent one is the deuteronomistic theme of national religious apostasy: the exile resulted from the failure to worship YHWH alone. This isn't the only explanation offered, however. The priestly tradition would cite cultic impurity; the Decalogue, book of the Covenant, and central portion of Deuteronomy would intimate a failure to live up to the community's

13. Arthur W. Frank, *The Wounded Storyteller: Body, Illness, and Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 55.

14. See the discussion "Shame and Guilt" in Lenore Terr, *Too Scared to Cry: Psychic Trauma in Childhood* (New York: Basic, 1990), 109–21.

15. In the following reading the signified "empire" slips from signifier to signifier, for example, Saul, Goliath, the Philistines, David, Solomon.

ethical code; individual stories suggest other problems, for example, violence in the society (Gen 4; 6–9; 19; Judg 19; 2 Sam 13–14), the corruption of leadership (Judg 17; 1 Sam 1–3), a monarchy oblivious to the needs and values of the people (2 Sam 15; 1 Kgs 21), and poor political decisions (1 Kgs 16; 18–20). Each rationalization marks a different route on the map of the community's future.

This network of competing theodicies, replete with the minority reports of embedded narratives, brings us back to the story of David. What is its role in a "constitutive" narrative that is grappling with conquest, exile, and colonization? What is it doing to help a maimed community mourn its loss, (re)create identity, find coherence, and move toward an alternative future?[16] How is it countering imperial rule? Unlike the Chronicler's account of David, this can hardly be a case of providing a glorious past as a source of "nationalistic" communal pride, or a "golden age" by which all subsequent reigns might be judged, or even a messianic template for future aspirations. This is not a nation "performing great deeds together" in the past and "wishing to perform still more."[17] Rather, to use David Jobling's cryptic description of the Deuteronomistic History: "It works from a fundamental contradiction: the past must have been good since it is our past, but it must have been bad since it gave rise to the intolerable present."[18] Or, to co-opt Cohen's lyrics, it is a *broken hallelujah*.

How does the ambivalence of David's story now function in this "intolerable present," in this occupied territory? Where does David sit now that the small Persian province affords no throne? How does the unruly Davidic dance of Samuel appear next to the stately march of the Chronicler's new, improved, more dignified David—especially as, all the while, a beleaguered and fragmented community looks on, trying to make sense of its past and to reimagine its future?

Remembering David[19]

While it is customary to compare and contrast (the supposedly later) Chronicles to (the supposedly earlier) Samuel in order to highlight the

16. "What is grasped as common experience can be met by common action" (Carr, "Narrative and the Real World," 20).

17. Renan, "What is a Nation?," 19. In fact, Uriah Kim observes the Deuteronomist History isn't really dealing with a "nation" at all (*Decolonizing Josiah: Toward a Postcolonial Reading of the Deuteronomistic History* [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005]).

18. Jobling, *1 Samuel*, 256.

19. The reading of David that follows is obviously dependent upon many of the fine and thoughtful readings of David that have focused on his ambiguity, especially

Chronicler's particular concerns, a synchronic reading is not only possible,[20] but necessary to glimpse the complexity of the communal response to exile and occupation. These two texts are co-existing, competing historical narratives, both responding to communal trauma but each employing its own mode of mourning, articulating its own distinctive theodicy, and charting its own course for the community's future.

Following the lead of postcolonial critic Sam Durrant, we might distinguish between two kinds of communal mourning: "*Successful mourning* enables the past to be assimilated or digested; one remembers in order to be consoled, ultimately in order to forget. By contrast, *true mourning* confronts an indigestible past, a past that can never be fully remembered or forgotten."[21] Narratives that "mourn successfully" diminish, and sometimes even allow the mourner to set aside, the pain of loss. Narratives that "truly mourn" work to keep past suffering from being forgotten and consequently erased. Attempting "to remember their own inability to remember," they are "narratives that draw attention to their own incompletion, the silence at their core."[22]

With its skeletal accounts and its preoccupation with registers, lists, and inventories, Chronicles is a history that hides bodies. Its people are more often names in a genealogy or catalogue, than acting characters. A quintessential example of "successful mourning," Chronicles reconstructs an easily "digestible" past. Its protagonist, a singularly pious and one-dimensional David, breaks onto the scene without introduction or personal history, taking the throne by popular demand. His one true desire: to build the House of YHWH. A unified, univocal community ("all Israel") supports him. The Davidic dynasty is effortlessly established: "Solomon successfully took over the throne of the LORD as king instead of his father David, and all went well with him. All Israel accepted him;

those by David Gunn, Peter Miscall, Robert Polzin, David Jobling, Joel Rosenberg, Walter Brueggemann. My modest contribution to this discussion offers nothing innovative about the "content" of the signifier "David," but rather explores how this ambiguous portrait of David may have functioned in the remembering community, and why it may have been important.

20. Cf. Peter Miscall: "The pictures of the Chronicler and of Samuel–Kings are more poles on a spectrum than mutually exclusive views that cancel each other. The two texts can be read as intertexts, as texts that are present at the same time and that are of the same status" ("For David Sake: A Response to David M. Gunn," in *Signs and Wonders: Biblical Texts in Literary Focus* [ed. J. Cheryl Exum; Semeia Studies; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1989], 153–63 [157]).

21. Sam Durrant, writing on the treatments of mourning by Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida in *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 31 (italics mine).

22. Durrant (ibid., 29), writing on the novels of J. M. Coetzee.

all the officials and the warriors and the sons of the King David as well, gave their hand in support of King Solomon" (1 Chr 29:23–24 JPS). And the house of YHWH is flawlessly designed and constructed: "And all of Solomon's work was well executed from the day the House of the LORD was founded until the House of the LORD was completed to perfection" (2 Chr 8:16 JPS). The Chronicler's world is one without scandal, without conflict, without emotion, without suffering.[23]

Its notice of the Babylonian conquest and exile is but a blip on the screen of the story of YHWH's house. Damage to YHWH's house gets more press than the violence against the people themselves (2 Chr 36:17–20). With cultic infraction as the framing explanation (2 Chr 36:14–16, 21), the brief report of the invasion is immediately overtaken by the reign of Cyrus and the possibility of cultic remedy (36:22–23). The wound is bandaged so quickly, we forget that it is even there; it certainly leaves no permanent scar. Thus, Chronicles cuts its losses literally and literarily and quickly moves on in collaboration with the new Empire. All but the House is forgotten; the Chronicler's history has lost its memory. But this amnesic account draws a simple and manageable blueprint for the community's successful future: rebuild the House; support the cult; cooperate with the Empire in order to do it.[24]

By contrast, the skeleton of Samuel's narrative bears much flesh, much of it bruised. Filled with complex personalities and complicated events, it forces us to engage a world of bodies—not only the bodies of its protagonists, but also the bodies who built, sustained, subverted, and were ultimately crushed by or imprisoned within the unstable houses of David and YHWH. It's not that all the bodies are remembered—indeed, our explorations in *Gender, Power, and Promise* suggest just the opposite—but the story exposes its own inability to remember. Traces of broken bodies and lives remain in various states of partial burial, exposure, and decay. Perhaps in its very hospitality to multiple, and sometimes incongruent, sources and traditions, in its refusal to pare down its cast of characters or to streamline its plot, in its tolerance of momentary disruptions by "people of no importance," in its willingness to allow characters to exceed individual significance,[25] Samuel's story admits

23. The only notable exception in David's story appears to be the census in 1 Chr 21, but the death toll is quickly passed over as the story is transformed into an etiology about the House of YHWH.

24. We might also underscore that the Chronicler's account is not "resistance literature." The empire is either the weapon of God or the savior.

25. See Tikva Frymer-Kensky's discussion in "Women of Metaphor, Metaphors of Women," in *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken, 2002), 333–38.

its effort to remember what it can neither ultimately remember nor ultimately forget.

In the spotlight, of course, is the body of David himself, obscured in Chronicles, but exposed in all sorts of ways in Samuel.[26] The Chronicler presents David *in medias res*, a middle-aged private citizen who needs only a genealogy and YHWH's endorsement to commend him to kingship. He busily organizes his kingdom with a minimum of conflict, and dies "at a ripe old age, having enjoyed long life, riches and honor" (1 Chr 29:28 JPS). For the Chronicler, much must be forgotten about David in order for the community to revisualize and reconstitute itself.

Samuel's David also lives a long life. Yet the evolution from the ruddy fair-eyed, handsome shepherd boy to the feeble, shivering king is riddled with complications and questions from its very inception. The narrative stammers in its attempt to bring him onto the scene, forcing its audience to strain (in both senses of the word) for a memory of David that makes sense of both him and their current situation.

The seventh son of a heretofore unknown Bethlehemite, the young David is designated by YHWH and anointed by Samuel to be the royal replacement waiting in the wings of Saul's tragedy.[27] And thus we begin with a cultural favorite—the success of the unknown and the unlikely: *"And Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers and the spirit of YHWH rushed to David from that day onward... And the spirit of YHWH turned aside from being with Saul and an evil spirit from YHWH terrified him..."* (1 Sam 16:13–14). Cast as the anointed secret and the repository of YHWH's spirit so recently departed from Saul, David's body takes on some of the attire that the wounded Judean community may have desired for itself: a leader who can arise from anywhere, an underdog who speaks and acts with special knowledge, an unlikely beneficiary of divine favor and protection. When David is later forced into exile, God's presence stays with him, through the wilderness, in the land of the Philistines, leaving King Saul abandoned and unable to secure any divine response under any conditions. David's body, as it were, takes on the role of the Ark of the Covenant: as God's presence is fixed to the Ark, so God remains proximate to David, even

26. David's dancing before the Ark is a case in point. While the Chronicler notes that Michal "despises" (*bzh*) David for dancing and rejoicing before the Ark, Samuel includes the subsequent interchange between them about "exposure" (*glh*).

27. Indeed, the narrative stuttering begins with Saul and his repeated appointments to leadership, ultimate failures, personal hauntings. The very rhythm of iteration suggests the difficulty of remembering and forgetting the qualities of David's predecessor.

when outside his homeland.[28] For a community who has experienced exile, whose identity and strategies for survival are bound up with the figure of David, and whose Ark has mysteriously fallen through the cracks of history, a god who accompanies the faithful into exile is strong consolation indeed. David will glorify this presence as "rock," "shield," "fortress," "lamp" in the straying hymn of 2 Sam 22. However, as we shall see, when the later King David tries to capitalize on God's presence by bringing the Ark itself into "the city of David," this contiguous deity becomes a disconcerting prospect (2 Sam 6:6–11), and the community in mourning must again ask itself in fear (as well as ask the dominating Empire in challenge), "Who can stand before this holy god YHWH? To whom can he go to be away from us?" (1 Sam 6:20).

Perhaps it is the attending spirit of YHWH that sparks the narrative's next memory of David. Ironically, it is the divine presence that gets David noticed by and connected to the royal court. When music therapy is prescribed for his divinely inspired torment, Saul requests an accomplished musician. One of his courtiers has a ready suggestion: "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who knows how to play, a man of valor, a man of war, well-spoken and well-built, and *YHWH is with him*" (1 Sam 16:18).[29] The boy is neither unknown nor unlikely after all, it seems, but a remarkably talented young man who has already ventured from the sheepfold into public view and acclaim. Co-opted by the king and inducted into the court of the man destined to be his enemy, David rises up in the ranks, becoming the king's armor bearer, then his soldier, then his captain who fights his battles for him. He does everything the king, who loves him, bids him to do. The story's colonized audience surely knows the necessity of collaborating with the enemy for the sake of survival. And survival is only the initial reward: success and power might follow—if one can compromise allegiance and integrity.

An implicated community shifts uncomfortably in its seat. The narrative hesitates, then stumbles on, reaching for yet another memory of David's beginning: David was the boy who slew Goliath, wasn't he? (If we aren't getting him confused with someone else…that hero named Elhanan, perhaps?) No, surely, David was the One who took on the giant and prevailed. The One who defended YHWH's honor and saved the people from a life of servitude. The One who helped to drive out the

28. The observation of Donna Laird, "The Character of God in 2 Samuel 6" (unpublished seminar paper, Drew University, 2006).

29. As David Gunn (*The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* [Sheffield: JSOT, 1980], 78) wryly notes, this endorsement of David "and YHWH is with him," underscores sharply "the fact that Yahweh is *not* with Saul!"

occupying army. An exemplar of courage in the face of overwhelming odds. Proof that one doesn't have to be big and powerful in order to be the agent of one's own redemption. Even one "little" (*bzh*, 1 Sam 17:42) in the eyes of a tyrant may eventually be able to cut off the tyrant's head. The mention of Elhanan goes into a footnote (2 Sam 21:19). This memory needs David, the David who could inspire resistance against an oversized and overconfident empire.

If only he would stop asking, "What's in it for the man who can kill that Philistine?" If only he would stop eyeing the king's daughters and coffers, all the while claiming himself to be "too trifling" of a man to become the king's son-in-law. But Saul knows a trifling man when he sees one, and it increasingly appears that David is trifling with him. Two hundred foreskins for a king's daughter—how many for the kingdom itself? And whose?

And what about Saul's son and heir, Jonathan, who loves David (as his father does [16:21]), whose soul, desires, passions are bound up in the soul, desires, passions of David (18:1), who delights in David *exceedingly* (19:1), who loves David as himself (18:3; 20:17), who will do for David whatever David desires him to do (20:4)? If David desires the kingdom, Jonathan will concede (23:17) because he loves David, more than his father, more than his inheritance, more than his role as heir apparent. And David cuts covenants with Jonathan as easily as he cuts off Philistine foreskins and the skirt of King Saul himself. Jonathan, of course, will die, and the community will be left forever wondering if his death was a convenience or an obstacle to David's bid for power.

A somewhat unstable and troubling picture of an ambitious David, but there's nothing wrong with ambition, is there? Even Israel had been ambitious, wanting a king like all the other nations, one who would save them from their enemies. David has all the makings of such a king. When he breaks away from Saul, it takes him no time to gather his own fighting force. The beloved rogue has a head for administration: an army needs revenue. How can it be generated? Landowners will need to be taxed, and if they are unwilling to contribute, threatened with severe consequences. Only a fool would rebuff the services offered by the Anointed One. Indeed the narrative seems to remember one such fool (*nabal*)—though his name has escaped us—let's just call him Fool. (It hardly matters—he died, too.[30]) And of course, there are other ways to

30. "This [1 Sam 25] is the first recorded protest in the narrative against Davidic taxation," remarks Joel Rosenberg (*King and Kin*, 150). However, he moves from this pithy observation to a somewhat romanticized view of the story and the Davidic dynasty in general: "David's providential rescue from the pride of the young is in its

build an empire: one can acquire property and power through marriage, war, looting; one can give gifts to one's allies; one can double-cross one's enemies—especially if YHWH is with you wherever you go.

So kingship comes with some unanticipated compromises for the common people. But the attraction of the rags-to-riches story is undeniable.[31] It is the kind of story audiences love to have recounted, especially if they're feeling pretty ragged themselves. Who wouldn't want to hear about how the ruddy young shepherd rose from the sheepfolds of Bethlehem to rule over all Israel?

But it was never really "all Israel," was it? "All Israel" is the construction of modern historiographers who want to depict David's reign and the Deuteronomistic History in general as a history of nation, empire, and "manifest destiny."[32] In the communal memory, unity and cohesion in David's kingdom is tenuous at best, achieved only by affirming what is not obvious ("we are your flesh and blood" say the tribes of Israel to David) and by cutting covenants to establish relationships where they did not previously or naturally exist (2 Sam 5:1–3). The names mark the fault lines: "*all* Israel *and* Judah" (5:5) or "the house of Judah" (2:7, 10, 11), "the house of Benjamin" (3:19), and "the house of Israel," or "the house of Saul" and "the house of David." There are surprisingly few instances in David's story where the appellative "Israel" unambiguously refers to Israel, Benjamin, and Judah combined.[33] Rather, "Israel," "the men of Israel," "all Israel" more often refer to those who followed Saul, who never stopped loving Saul, no matter what the beloved (*dvd*) David did, and who seemed to need little excuse to switch allegiances (14:10, 13) or to return to their northern tents (20:1–2).

It was not as though the beloved David did not try his hardest to bring "all Israel" into his house. He made the strategic diplomatic overtures (2 Sam 2:4–7). He sent out troops (2:8–32). He cut deals (3:12–21). He

own way a step in the direction of a more focused and responsible politics, and so a major stride in the Israelite cultural endeavor. Unfortunately, it will not shield him from the cupidity of middle age, even though the chain of events precipitated by that cupidity will ultimately lead to a dynasty, in whose protective shade literacy as such, alphabetic and traditionary, will flourish" (p. 155).

31. Walter Brueggemann (*David's Truth in Israel's Imagination and Memory* [2d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002], 8–32) asserts that there is a celebratory quality to the preceding episodes that he labels "the trustful truth of the tribe." While we might agree on the multi-dimensional quality of "David's truth," I sense a more complicated process of memory taking place.

32. See Kim, *Decolonizing Josiah*.

33. The exceptions seem to occur in "overlaid" texts such as 2 Sam 7, where YHWH is speaking and David's response mimics YHWH's language.

reunited with Saul's daughter Michal (3:13–15). He appointed himself caretaker of Jonathan's remaining son Mephibosheth (2 Sam 9). And he held all those press conferences on the House of Saul, delivering those carefully constructed public speeches—lamenting Saul and Jonathan, lamenting Abner, condemning the assassins of Ishbosheth. (*The baffled king composing hallelujahs right and left....*) One might even imagine the conveyance of the Ark to "the city of David" as a gesture to (subsume) "Israel." While "all the house of Israel" provided the escort for its definitive cult object, David (of the House of Judah) took on the role of a new Samuel, leading the processional dressed in a priestly linen ephod, administering burnt offerings and sacrifices of wellbeing (cf. 1 Sam 2:18; 7:1–17), and feeding all the people as though he were the universal tree of life itself.[34]

And yet "all Israel" would not dissolve into the house of David. Perhaps the man lamented too readily, danced too fast, waited too long to make amends, claimed too much for himself. The co-opting of the Ark is a case in point. Despite being grand marshal of the Ark's parade, David is exposed (*glh*), both literally and figuratively. Michal, now an ornamental fixture in David's house, looks down upon David's flamboyant spectacle and in her mind ("heart"), David becomes a small (*bzh*, 2 Sam 6:16) and empty, vain (*reyq*, 6:20) man. The one who once claimed himself to be "too trifling" (*qll*) to become the king's son-in-law now takes over the role of both king and priest and insists that he has been chosen over Saul and over all of Saul's house, and that he will laugh in the presence of the Lord and become more "trifling" (*qll*) still. And, of course, he *can* have the last laugh and behave however he pleases, because he has now taken possession of the Ark and housed it in his very own city, just as he has taken possession of Michal and confined her in his house.

But both Michal and the Ark resist becoming David's personal talismans. While YHWH will accede to building a house for David, he will eschew the house that David desires to build for him. God is not to be contained in any house, much less one designed to ensure the cultic consolidation of the kingdom. Ironically, such a house, when it is finally built by Solomon, will fracture the kingdom rather than unite it.[35] And Michal, the one member of the House of Saul who could have made the alliance with the House of David one of actual "flesh and bone," is now completely alienated by David's attempt to co-opt the House of Saul, to

34. Cf. Rosenberg, *King and Kin*, 118.

35. This is one of those instances in which elements, for example, the allusion to the House of God eventually being built, that may have originally served Solomon's agenda, are transformed into difficult memories that promote mourning.

erase her family's legacy, and to justify his success on the grounds of moral worth and divine favoritism.[36] The community remembers the two things together: the tented Ark and the captive Michal housed in the city of David, each resisting a house that David is desperate to build.

Indeed, like the maw of Sheol that can never be satisfied, the ingestions of Jerusalem will weigh heavy in communal memory. David will bring here the last remaining heir of the House of Saul, more wives, and a whole host of mercenaries. David himself will find it increasingly difficult to leave the confines of his city and his house. But as he retreats further and further within city and palace walls, his ability to rein in either his family or his kingdom weakens. David's house dissolves into a house of violence and death where "things that are not done in Israel" (2 Sam 13) are done without impunity. With this comes the dissolution of a fragile kingdom: Absalom easily sways the hearts of the "men of Israel" with memories and promises of royal justice. Even after his rebellion is dispelled, another insurgency ensues, and the "men of Israel" and the "men of Judah" are corralled together only in an uneasy and restless truce (19:10–20:22).

And so it was: "All Israel" could not be bound to David—not by the strings of his lyre, no matter how beautiful his lyrics or moving his lamentations, nor by the cords of his slingshot, no matter how agile his movements or pious his words, nor by the bowstrings of his army, no matter how mighty his "mighty men," nor by the bonds of matrimony, no matter how mutually beneficial the alliance. The constant unraveling of "all Israel" would haunt David until the day of his death.

Which brings us to Joab and Shimei, David's final preoccupation.

During his last days, when David cannot even remember if he has named a successor, when his body cannot remember desire, he remembers Joab and Shimei and pronounces their death sentence. Why?

Why does David curse Joab his right-hand man with his very last breath? We might imagine it is for killing his son Absalom (who had lured the "men of Israel" away from him). Or for upbraiding him in front of the people after Absalom's death. Or for conspiring against him to bring Absalom home after the murder of Amnon. But these are not the reasons he gives. No, he curses Joab for killing Saul's general Abner and Absalom's general Amasa, the two men who could have helped David bring "all Israel" into his house and whose deaths had guaranteed that the rift between Israel and Judah would never heal.[37] In the words of Joel Rosenberg, Joab's consistent contravening of Davidic policy and his

36. A feat effectively accomplished by the Chronicler.

37. Cf. Rosenberg, *King and Kin*, 167–68.

tendency to commit "politically inconvenient" murders posed significant questions about the nature of David's reign:

> [T]he relation between David and Joab is a continuing issue through the entire court history, and…the vicissitudes of this relation are a sensitive indicator of David's overall power, or lack of it. The intertwined fortunes of David and Joab are, in a sense, a chief hidden problem of David's reign. For the king's shifting ability to exploit or dispense with the services of a key Judean family ("the sons of Zeruiah") serves as a guide to the success or failure of the king's pan-Israelite ambitions. How universal can his reign be? How parochial must it remain?[38]

Parochial it does remain. David's inability to restrain the rash blade of Joab is matched by his inability to control the political rumor mill.[39] The taunts of Shimei the Benjaminite during David's flight from Jerusalem reveal that, for some, David's rise to kingship was powered by something other YHWH's preference and David's moral worth. According to Shimei, David's taking of Saul's throne was a violent and criminal usurpation: "Get out! Get out, you man of blood! You son of Beliel! YHWH has brought back upon you all the blood of the house of Saul in whose place you now reign! YHWH is handing over the kingdom to your son Absalom. Behold, you are in your own evil for you are man of blood!" (1 Sam 16:7–8). Threatening to expose the bodies, Shimei (like Joab) seems to know things about David that David would rather have forgotten. And Shimei intimates that "all Israel" would rather have Absalom as king, simply because he is not David.

How could anyone think that David had taken Saul's throne through violence? He had been like Saul's own son. He had been Jonathan's renowned soul mate. Michal's first husband. He had been miles from the battle in which Saul and Jonathan had fallen. He had sung his laments for them so loudly that all Israel could hear, and he had made the sons of Judah learn them as well. Yet other stories linger, and Shimei is not the only one who remembers them. Shimei's curse prompts the narrative to disclose another memory—a memory of famine and an alleged Gibeonite call for blood vengeance on the house of Saul (2 Sam 21:1–14). Does David investigate? No, he is content to believe the accusation. The restitution? The lives of all of Saul's remaining heirs. Except Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, of course, who continues to be hobbled to David's table in Jerusalem. (But even that qualification gets fuzzy, since another

38. Rosenberg, *King and Kin*, 168.

39. On this theme and the role of historian as gossiper, see Stuart Lasine, *Knowing Kings: Knowledge, Power, and Narcissism in the Hebrew Bible* (Semeia Studies; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001).

Mephibosheth is executed, and there seems to be some confusion about whether the other sons were those of Michal or Merab.) The intrusion of this memory so soon after the Shimei episode (16:5–14; 19:16–24) and the Benjaminite Sheba's rebellion (2 Sam 20) causes one to wonder about its place in the chronology. *When* did David execute the rest of Saul's male descendents? Is it a late occurrence in David's career? A flashback to earlier days of his reign? Does it give credence to Shimei's accusation? A rationale for Sheba's revolt? Is it placed as an appendix because it is too painful, too scandalous to remember? Or does its placement suggest that this memory, like the bodies it recounts, threatens to be eaten by time? Is it further evidence of the community trying to remember its own inability to remember? The narrative, like the vigilant Rizpah, beats back the forgetfulness that waits to devour the bones of the innocent, the forgetfulness that might have been content to exonerate David as simply the man after God's own heart, "beloved" (*dvd*) of "all Israel."

Remembering Justice

But if memories of David mark the pressure points for a community facing both "external threats of destruction" and "its own centrifugal tendency to fragment," they represent yet another quandary for any audience with deuteronomistic leanings. Unlike nearly all the other kings of Israel and Judah in the mostly deuteronomistic history, David is never censured for his lack of cultic allegiance. Following "YHWH alone" is never a problem for him. He is the man after God's own heart, the one who brings the Ark to Jerusalem, the one who dreams of building YHWH a house. The poster child of the Deuteronomistic Historian, he sets the standard of orthopraxy by which all other kings must be measured. That is certainly a recurring memory of David (1 Kgs 2:2–4; 3:14; 9:4–5; 11:33; 14:8; 15:3–5; 16:2) and the tack the Chronicler exploits.

But countering his impeccable cultic fidelity is both his renowned ambiguity[40] and the pivotal moment of moral failure that ruptures the consciences and consciousness of all who remember David. The man after God's own heart is also a man who commits adultery and murder. The fact that he remains God's anointed has given rise to countless sermons and meditations on human sin and divine forgiveness. But the episode of David's taking of Bathsheba and murder of Uriah is not so

40. The ambiguity of David's character has now been explored by many scholars, but most pointedly by David Gunn. In addition to his monographs on Saul and David, see "In/security Who is David?," in Exum, ed., *Signs and Wonders*, 133–51.

easily tamed, even by the constraints of lectionary pericopes and theological convictions. Indeed, the failure of David to pay the penalties for his own sins disrupts and subverts the Deuteronomist's rigid system of justice where good is rewarded and evil punished.

We might imagine the narrative stuttering again in the attempt to launch this painful piece of the story. For, as it begins, David no longer goes to fight against Israel's enemies as kings are want to do. This is a problem, since this is the very reason Israel wanted a king in the first place: *"We want a king over us and we will be like all the other nations. Our king will execute justice for us and will go forth before us and fight our battles"* (1 Sam 8:19b–20). With Israel's vision of monarchy in the background, the narrative attempts to remember how it came to be that David fails to live up to his kingly duty. Perhaps the vignette in 2 Sam 22:15–17 was a frame for this story in the minds of some. There, the near-death of David on the battlefield rallies his soldiers to suspend him from fighting lest "the lamp of Israel" be extinguished. However, the moving concern of his brothers-in-arms is relegated to the footnote beside Elhanon's in favor of a less flattering rationale: "*And so it was at the turn of the year, at the time when kings [or is it messengers or emissaries?] go forth [to war], David sent Joab and his servants with him and 'all Israel'...and David stayed in Jerusalem*" (2 Sam 11:1). The irony that the trouble begins when David is not where he is supposed to be is rarely lost on homileticians, commentators, or pious parents advising their offspring. But perhaps more important to communal memory is the option that, rather than succumbing to the insistence of his loyal men, David simply chose not to go, adopting the royal prerogative of leisure. The ambiguous wording, *malakim*, spelled as "agents" or "messengers" but sounding like "kings," forces a double irony. Not only is he declining to do what kings are supposed to do, but he is sending agents to risk their lives in his place.[41] Consequently, not only is the recurring motif of messages and messengers foreshadowed here, but also the theme of others dying for the sake of David's prerogatives.

41. See Rosenberg's discussion of this Kethib/Qere: "While it seems unwise to accord conflicting versions of a biblical word *equal* weight (the two words, after all, are unrelated and spelled differently, and only one of the two can occupy the textual space accorded it), the fact that the ambiguity exists at all suggests that conflicting interpretive pressures…may themselves have helped shape the history of the text. This is, after all, the first place in the Bible that a leader of Israel stays off the battlefield in a time of war, and the question of the role of agents in the conduct of kingly business returns again and again throughout the story…" (*King and Kin*, 126).

The irony doesn't end there. The allusion to Israel's monarchical desire carries yet another jab, for in it the narrator attempts to remember justice: *"We want a king over us and we will be like all the other nations. Our king will execute justice for us and will go forth before us and fight our battles."* So the people had said: a king who *will execute justice*. And thus the narrator begins a story where David's subjects repeatedly become his objects—the desirable Bathsheba to be taken, the inconvenient Uriah to be murdered, and men of valor to be sacrificed thoughtlessly to cover his crime. "Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes" he writes to Joab. "The sword eats first one and then another."

But the appeal to a ravenous and uncontrollable blade is hardly likely either to convince or to console an audience who has experienced the losses of home and family, and who now hear themselves classified as potential sword fodder. They may have followed David through thick and thin, witnessing his trials and triumphs, but they may now indeed relate more to those who are allowed no significant subjectivity—the silenced Bathsheba and Uriah and contingent of fallen soldiers, not to mention the condemned baby—than to the man after God's own heart.[42]

The pain of remembering increases as the body count rises. We watch as Bathsheba's baby dies, as Amnon rapes Tamar, as Tamar is dragged offstage and sequestered in her brother's house, as Absalom assassinates Amnon, as Absalom rapes his father's concubines "in the sight of all Israel." We might imagine that our watching, and that of "all Israel," is matched by David's. But while we may claim to be helpless voyeurs, David purposely turns his head, refusing to see what is being played before him. He is a "successful mourner," easily putting the pain—especially the pain of others—behind him. Bathsheba mourns for her husband; David brings her to the palace and makes her his wife. Her baby dies; David ceases to pray and asks for food. Amnon is assassinated; David turns his emotional attention to the missing Absalom. Tamar can live locked away, desolate and inconsolable. The raped concubines can be imprisoned in a "house of keeping," forever disgraced. David (like the Chronicler) can put them all out of sight and forget them.

42. Or in the words of narrative and film critic Michael Roemer, "While the plot offers us certain guarantees—the wicked will be punished and justice will prevail—stories are not finally reassuring. We identify with the hero but can hardly fail to notice that in the course of most narratives innocent bystanders like ourselves are savaged, and end up as wet spots along the road" (*Telling Stories: Postmodernism and the Invalidation of Traditional Narrative* [Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995], 179).

The narrator remembers David failing to execute justice, failing to live justly, and refusing to address the cost of his own House.

But the community remembers the cost and remembers justice, even as it slips from sight. The memory of justice is painful, not only because David loses sight of it, not only because the surviving community is desperately in need of it, but because YHWH, too, must be judged by it. As David Gunn observed in his study of Saul, "[Q]uestions about the moral basis of Yahweh's action are inescapable. If we are to condemn Saul for his jealous persecution of David, how much more is Yahweh to be condemned for his jealous persecution of Saul!"[43]

If YHWH behaves like Saul, how much more does he behave like David? This is the question raised by Swedish author Torgny Lindgren in his provocative novel *Bathsheba*. After their first sexual encounter, Bathsheba asks the mumbling David,

> "You have been speaking with the Lord?"
> "I am always speaking with the Lord," he replied. "He is the only one who understands me."
> "What is the nature of the Lord?" Bathsheba asked.
> "He is like me," said King David.
> Like me.
> And Bathsheba thought of how he had almost crushed her and of his uncontrolled lust.[44]

Indeed, do we not witness in these memories of David a community wrestling not only with the nature of its past, but with "the nature of the Lord"? What does it mean to conceive of YHWH as the god after David's own heart? As David takes women from others, so YHWH confesses to taking the women of others and giving them to David.[45] Moreover, he punishes David by giving his women to someone else. How dare David treat women as objects when that is YHWH's prerogative?[46] If the bodies of women—and children—are the means by which YHWH punishes men,

43. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul*, 128–29.

44. Torgny Lindgren, *Bathsheba* (trans. Tom Geddes; New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 6.

45. See Tod Linafelt, "Taking Women in Samuel: Readers/Responses/Responsibility," in *Reading Between Texts: Intertextuality and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Danna Nolan Fewell; Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 99–113, and Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*, 141–86.

46. Indeed YHWH's indictment of David is framed as a personal affront. David has taken YHWH and his word "lightly" (*bzh*), that is, as a small matter, in his taking of Uriah's wife. The echo here of Michal considering David "small" (*bzh*) in 2 Sam 6 is ironic. YHWH here, like David there, goes into self-defensive and aggressive mode.

one might then revisit Nathan's parable and rethink the players. For just as David becomes identified with the man who takes another man's lamb, slaughters it, and feeds it to his guest, so, too, YHWH takes Bathsheba's baby and kills it in order to make his point with David. Thus the much-noted irony of "You are the man!" doubles its weight, becoming a heavy—and deadly—theological burden. YHWH's sword will eat first one and then another as the house of David is punished "four-fold." We might also infelicitously note that YHWH's skills as a mathematician leave much to be desired—while the sons of David may constitute the official body count of the four-fold punishment, the actual casualties will be much more extensive. The death toll of civilians and enlistees won't even make the evening news.

Lest we think this an aberration in the relationship of David and YHWH, we have only to attend to another communal memory—that of David's census that, in Samuel, is incited by YHWH (but in Chronicles is blamed on a more theologically convenient Satan). When David confesses his sin, he is given a choice of punishments, one of which would have affected him alone. He and YHWH, however, negotiate a plague on the land instead, and 70,000 people die as a result of David's indiscretion. The death angel's vantage point, the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, is purchased by David as an altar site which, in Chronicles, becomes the site of the Temple. Thus the story begins to hint at what Solomon's work corvée will make manifest: the House of God is built upon the bodies of the people.

Hence we come full circle to the body of David and the presence of YHWH. The intimacy of god and king leaves the people, common and royal alike, in a precarious position. While they may at times find shelter in the shadow of God's protection of the anointed one, they are just as likely to be sacrificed for the sake of his personal peace or his politics. And there is no heaven to help them if they stand in the line of fire when God is irritated with the royal son. Perhaps this is where the wounded community imagines itself: caught in the middle, suffering in the aftermath, of a violent domestic quarrel between an angry Father and a rebellious son.[47] It has become the confiscated lamb now feeding a wealthy Empire, the baby sacrificed on theological principle.

Memories of justice make the community's memories of God and king complicated and painful. Memories of God and king make memories of justice all the more imperative. "Just" is the way David had wanted to be

47. And here, too, is yet another complication. The king has usurped the role of Israel itself: the community remembers that they were once called YHWH's son (Exod 4:22; Deut 32:6).

remembered: "The one who rules over humankind in justice (*tsadiq*), the one who rules in the fear of God, is like the light of the morning when the sun is rising…" (2 Sam 23:3–4). It is the way he had wanted his son to be remembered: "Guard what YHWH your god has given you to guard" says David to Solomon, "—to walk in his ways and to guard his statutes, his commandments, his rules of justice (*mishpatayv*), and his testimony that is written in the *torah* of Moses, in order that you may be prudent in all that you do and wherever you turn" (2 Kgs 2:3). As memories of justice slip through in the words of David, they also emerge in the unburied bones of Saul's sons. They call from the Tablets lying forgotten in the Ark of God. They erupt in characters like Jonathan, Michal, and Rizpah who refuse to be determined by the priorities of monarchy, empire, or occupation. They leak into transitory moments when people like Uriah, Abigail, and the woman from Tekoa disrupt and divert the dense currents of political power. They shape Hannah's vision. They echo in Tamar's cries: "No, my brother! Such things are not done in Israel!" And they fall into the dark and silent gaps where stories, lives, and futures should have been but were not.

Thus, as the wounded community takes stock of its past and present, the memories of David, God, justice, and the cost of "the House" multiply and find their places in a contorted coherence. It is a stubborn recounting that even remembers what David himself wants most to forget and to have others forget: the David who tried to erase the faults and fissures in his reign by ignoring them, covering them up, or caulking them with blood. This is hardly the singularly purposeful leader of Chronicles who can rally the community to build the House of God. This is hardly the homogeneous "all Israel" of the Chronicler's story world who speaks and acts as one, who can be easily marshaled for the cause of a cult that will collect taxes for the Empire. Rather, the Davidic collage with its tenuous "Israel and Judah" (1 Kgs 1:35), with its sacrificed bodies and silenced voices, with its frighteningly Davidic deity presses its post-exilic audience to deal with the truth of its social, physical, and theological trauma, with the reality of current social and political compromise, and with the likelihood that the community's story can no longer entertain a tidy, much less triumphant, ending. The resulting story is a splintered reflection, a quite cold and broken hallelujah, that is acutely aware of its "own inability to remember," and more gravely attentive to the wounds, the silences, the incongruities, the compromises at its core. For, if the prospect of death had fractured the foundation of "the House" from the very beginning, how much more does it haunt the ruins among which the community now dwells?

Son of David and Son of Saul

Philip R. Davies

I must begin by apologizing if my contribution to this volume is more about Saul than about David. But David Gunn is especially good at finding unusual angles. He has also written a fine book about Saul.[1] And if these two excuses do not suffice, let us think of Saul as a failed David, or perhaps a beta-version of the ideal king. Or realize that it was Saul who gave him all his chances (not to mention his daughter), who made David's career possible.

But I'm not writing primarily about the Saul and David of the Hebrew Bible, but about another pair: Saul of Tarsus and Jesus, the most famous "son of David." Here another apology is due. The vast amount of scholarly literature on Paul and his letters cannot possibly be reflected in this short essay; nor, to be frank, do I have the expertise or experience to draw upon it in great depth. I hope that what I say is sufficiently original, but it seems to me that there is little that could be said about Saul/Paul that has not been. I have therefore kept a tight focus on issues relevant to the pairing of Jesus/Paul and David/Saul, and, fortunately, I have not encountered much discussion of this in the standard works.

Saul ben Kish, as the story in 1 Samuel tells it, became jealous of David and ended up by pursuing him and trying to kill him. Saul of Tarsus likewise began a career persecuting the followers of the "son of David." There are, of course, major differences between the two cases. Most obviously, the order of appearance is different. The meetings between the two pairs of protagonists are both similar and different: Saul encountered David for the first time twice, first as a musician (2 Sam 16:14–23), then as a shepherd and would-be slayer of Goliath (17:31–58—note the last verse!). Saul of Tarsus also met his "son of David" twice, though never in a human encounter—first, indirectly, as a messianic cult figure, and then in direct confrontation with a heavenly

1. David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (JSOTSup 14; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1980).

apparition on the road to Damascus (Acts 9; Gal 1:1–24). An intertextual study of the two pairs, however immediately attractive, might therefore on reflection look somewhat forced or even contrived. But I want to persevere with it, and even to suggest not the pure intertextuality that is created by a reader,[2] but a more intentional connection between these antagonists, quite probably on the part of the author of Acts and possibly also in the case of Saul/Paul himself.

Saul in Acts

Let's look first at what the author of Acts (we'll call him Luke) has Paul proclaiming in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:21–23):

> Then they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul ben Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, who reigned for forty years. When he had removed him, he made David their king. In his testimony about him he said, "I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my heart, who will carry out all my wishes." From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised.

Now, this is the only mention of King Saul in the New Testament, and it is attributed to someone who is so far known only as Saul. This coincidence has been largely unremarked, but Williams, for one, made the reasonable suggestion[3] that it may be significant. Dunn's comment on this as "a pleasant speculation"[4] is probably a typical judgment. Yet, while David, by contrast, is called here "son of Jesse" but not "of the tribe of Judah" and the length of his reign is not given, "Saul son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, who reigned for forty years" is more fulsome than Saul's argument requires and the reader might well infer that that he is rather proud of his namesake.[5] Whether we should conclude

2. The classic definition of intertextuality is that of Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue, and the Novel," in *The Kristeva Reader* (ed. T. Moi; New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 35–61: every text is informed by other texts that the reader has read, and by the reader's own cultural context.

3. David J. Williams, *Acts* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 233.

4. James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of Apostles* (Epworth Commentaries; Peterborough: Epworth, 1996), 179.

5. Incidentally, the Masoretic text of 1 Sam 13:1 says that Saul was a year old when he began to reign and that he reigned two years. This is how the KJV translates it, while the NRSV indicates that something is missing from both figures and the JPS only from the first figure. The Net Bible supplies 30 for the first figure and 40 for the second, but notes the problem. A reign of two years is not impossible for the events that are narrated. To make matters more curious, most LXX manuscripts omit the verse entirely. Of those Greek manuscripts that do include it, some have "one year"

that Saul/Paul himself, aware of his name and Benjaminite affiliation, was responsible for the mention of Saul (as Williams seems to think) is another matter, and later on we shall ask what his own attitude may have been; but as with all reported speeches in Acts (and in classical antiquity), we cannot be sure how far the reported or recreated words reflect the actual speech or sentiments of the speaker rather than the author. For the moment we should comment only on the Saul as constructed and presented by Luke.

What makes it important to focus on Luke is that in this same chapter he stops calling his hero "Saul" and calls him "Paul." Is this in imitation of a biblical trope? The Hebrew Bible has several cases of changes of name. Abram is renamed Abraham and Jacob Israel. Sometimes there is no significant moment or lasting change, but a duplicate name that may point to a story cycle in which originally separate characters were involved, as perhaps with Daniel/Belteshazzar or Gideon/Jerubbaʿal. However, it was quite common for Hellenized Jews to have both Semitic and Greek names, and in such cases both would be continually used. It is not historically likely that "Saul" *changed* his name to "Paul" at some crucial point: rather, he had from birth a double name (or double *form* of the name) and used one when writing in Greek to Greeks and the other when speaking Aramaic or perhaps even with fellow Jews. Or it may be that Paulus was his cognomen, given that he was a Roman citizen.[6] But this does not explain Luke's usage. In Acts 7 the hero is introduced as Saul, and this remains his name until 13:9, when he is named as "Saul, also known as Paul." So, although Luke acknowledges that both names remain valid, "Paul" is now consistently used for the remainder of Acts—except for two occasions in which his "conversion" is recalled (22:7, 13; and 26:14). Here Luke finds it appropriate for Paul to use his Semitic name (albeit in the mouths of others). Indeed, 26:14 makes it clear that the heavenly voice addressed him in *te hebraiki dialekto*—probably meaning Aramaic. Why does Luke impose a *chronological* order on the

but some "thirty years" for the first figure. The Syriac Peshitta has Saul's age as twenty-one and omits the second part of the verse. (There are unfortunately no Qumran biblical manuscripts containing 1 Sam 13.) The NIV is one translation that seems to work from Acts 13, and gives "42 years" (adding the 2 and the 40). But where does Acts get its figure of 40 from? It would seem that whatever figures once stood here, the first was clearly seen to be an error and the latter taken by many as improbable. Or is this a further clue to the author/speaker's view of the merits of Saul's reign?

6. F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (London: Tyndale, 1951), 257; Ernest Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965; repr. Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 399–400 n. 1.

choice of name? And why is the transition at this particular moment, especially when that moment is well after the apostle's character may be said to have changed definitively? Haenchen gives a fairly typical explanation in suggesting that "Luke goes over to a new name…at the very moment when Paul through a miracle proves himself the missionary filled with the Holy Spirit, who is now the real head of the Christian group."[7] There is a further complication in that the proconsul in this story is also called Paulus (13:7). This may be a genuine coincidence; no obvious point seems to be made by it—other than a further drawing of attention to the name itself. That should, perhaps, not be ruled out. But surely the most striking feature is that the change to Paul occurs just before Saul/Paul refers for the first and only time to his royal predecessor.

The main argument of the speech is to link the kingdom of Israel (a kingdom that Saul himself had initiated) with the kingdom of God. The theme of the "kingdom of God" is quite prominent in Acts, since it opens (1:3, 6) and closes (28:23, 31) the book, and in between we are reminded of it in 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; and 20:25. So it is not exclusively connected to Saul/Paul, though Paul's life and work are presented as the major part of the proclamation, and indeed the spread, of that kingdom, even to Rome. The speech of Acts 13 argued for a continuity between these kingdoms, as does the final speech of Paul where his own status seems to be offered by Luke as a parallel to that of the last Davidic king.[8] It is thus not only the name of David that links the old kingdom to the new through his descendant, but that of Saul too. Luke is hinting at a connection between Saul and David and between Jesus and Paul, standing as they do at the beginning and end of the kingdom that begins in Israel and ends with all nations. It is a faint hint—but it seems to me nevertheless unavoidable, and the best explanation for the curiosities of ch. 13, where Saul becomes Paul.

David in Acts

The title "son of David" occurs nowhere in Acts. Although we find it in Matthew ten times (including in the title, 1:1), both Mark and Luke are more sparing, with only three occurrences.[9] The widespread assumption

7. Haenchen, *Acts*, 400.

8. 2 Kgs 25:27–30; see Phillip Davies, "The Ending of Acts," *Expository Times* 94 (1983): 334–35.

9. Mark and Luke share the story of the blind man who calls on Jesus as "son of David" (Mark 10/Luke 18), but also Mark puts on Jesus' lips a denial of the title in 12:36. Luke does not reproduce this (Matthew does, with perhaps more ambiguity);

is that its connotations of military deliverance (to those who understood it) made it counter-productive and even dangerous. Acts, like Luke's Gospel, is content to link Jesus biologically with David—and that only once. Much more commonly, Luke presents David as a prophet, a foreteller of the Messiah, rather than a prototype (see 1:16; 2:25, 31, 34; 7:45; 13:34; and compare Mark 12:26). In the speech where Saul alludes to Saul, there occurs also this interesting contrast between the two (13:36–37):

> For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, died, was laid beside his ancestors, and underwent decay; but he whom God raised up suffered no decay.

Peter's speech in 2:14–36 makes a similar point (vv. 29, 34); v. 30 hints at Jesus as the promised "descendant" on "his" throne—meaning God's throne, not David's. The line of descent from David to Jesus is not denied, but it isn't exactly highlighted, either. It is almost incidental, a simple claim of biological fact, but of no significance for understanding the nature of Jesus' "Christhood," his messiahship. In short, it's not a messianic title.

Saul/Paul on Himself

It is not unrealistic or fanciful to think that a Jew called Saul, interacting with a Jesus whom he (and others) acknowledged as descended from David, was totally unaware of the coincidence.[10] I think it would have been extraordinarily out of character for Saul *not* to have reflected on it. But did he do so only privately, or also in his letters? To answer this we can start with how he describes himself. He is, of course, a Jew, and he does talk about "Jews" several times (mostly in Romans).[11] But only in Acts does Luke have him actually call himself a Jew (21:39; 22:3). In his letters "the Jews" are others. Hence he speaks of "Jews and Greeks" (Rom 2:9, 10; 10:12; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11); or he speaks *to* Jews ("if you call yourself a Jew," Rom 2:17; cf. Gal 2:14) or to someone who may be

Luke's only other reference is in Jesus' genealogy, 3:31, where it is not used in a titular way.

10. I have benefited much from Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of Ancient Personality* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), on ancient personality, though they do not touch directly upon the features I am trying to draw out here.

11. The full list of references is Rom 1:16; 2:9, 10, 17, 28, 29; 3:1; 10:12; 1 Cor 9:20; Gal 2:14; 3:28; Col 3:11.

either non-Jewish or Jewish (Rom 2:28, 29). Or in general terms: "the Jew" (Rom 3:1). In just one place he talks about himself and Jewishness: "to the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews" (1 Cor 9:20). The wording warrants some careful attention. First, he speaks only of behaving like a Jew, towards Jews, even though he presumably understands himself as one, and is understood by other Jews as one. He will not, or cannot, call himself "non-Jew" and so he goes on to redefine "Jew" as "under the law," so that he speaks of addressing those "not under the law"—which he also becomes (v. 21). In this sense, then, he defines himself as non-Jewish, too! Then he seems to dilute the distinction by adding, in the oft-quoted phrase, that he "becomes all things to all people" (v. 22). He has entirely avoided the issue of his own Jewish identity and in fact seems to place himself outside the category of "Jew" in the sense in which he defines it: as being "under the law."[12]

In other words, he doesn't actually say he is a *Jew*. For him, at least in his letters, "Jew" is apparently a religious category. He prefers "Israelite" to describe himself. This, incidentally, is used also by Luke in Peter's speeches (2:22, 29; 3:12), in Gamaliel's words (5:35),[13] by the Jewish crowd in 21:28, and in 13:16 by Paul himself. In Rom 9:4 and 6 he refers to "Israelites" as "my own people, my kindred'; in 2 Cor 11:22, he says "Are they Israelites? So am I." And, most emphatically of all, in Rom 11:1 he says "I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin." "Israelite," then, rather than "Jew," is the term by which Saul/Paul identifies himself with his own people.

Was there a recognized distinction between "Jew" and "Israelite" in the time of Paul? The question is very hard to answer: there probably were many nuances by which the two were at different times and contextsdifferentiated.[14] In the Hebrew Bible, *yehudi* mostly means "Judean" (as *distinct* from "Israelite").[15] Although the geographical meaning,

12. I must again remind the reader that I am avoiding most of the issues that Paul's categories of Jew and non-Jew entail, about which there is voluminous discussion; I am focusing not on theological categories, but on the writer's own self-identity.

13. Its use of Moses in Stephen's speech, Acts 7:23, 27 probably need not be included in this list.

14. For an overview, see Graham Harvey, *The True Israel: Uses of the Names Jews, Hebrew and Israel in Ancient Jewish and Early Christian Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

15. The book of Judith (preserved in Greek, probably a translation of a book written in the second or first century B.C.E.) describes events supposed to have taken place under "Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled over the Assyrians" (1:1!), and the Judeans have just returned from exile (4:3). The land and people threatened are in Judea, but

"Judean," may still have been primary in Ezra and Nehemiah, *yehudi(m)* often carries a religious connotation, as, for example, in Zech 8:23 and in Daniel, where it clearly designates one who worships the "god of Israel," and where it has become the designation of a member of an ethnic cult, or, as some contemporaries would describe it, a philosophy. No doubt the extension of the kingdom of Judah under the Hasmoneans with the "conversion" of neighbouring populations to the Jewish cult contributed to the extended meaning of *Ioudaios*,[16] but "Judean" no doubt remained as a definition of those who lived in Judah, especially after the Hasmonean realm was divided, and some scholars have therefore suggested that in the Fourth Gospel, *ioudaioi* has precisely this meaning.[17]

In this context, can we know how Saul/Paul might entertain, or communicate, any distinction between "Jew" and "Israelite"? Theologically, as I have suggested, he may wish to treat "Jew" as a religious category that he thinks is now obsolete, while maintaining that "Israel" remains proudly the people chosen by God. Indeed, his unique and much-discussed "Israel of God" in Gal 6:16 may illustrate precisely this difficult distinction he wants to make between "Israel" and "Judaism." My interest here is in the *personal* dimension of that distinction, which is not necessarily one built exclusively on theological argumentation but on a question of his own identity—as a Saul and not a David. That he is reluctant to call himself a Jew but proud to call himself an Israelite is not, I think, purely casuistry.

A clue to the personal dimension of Saul's Israelite, as opposed to Judean (?), identity may lie in the story of Esther. Here, Mordecai's and Esther's people are regularly described as *yehudim*. Yet Mordecai himself is not *Judean* at all, but Benjaminite, and conspicuously so: "Now there was a *Jew* in the fortress city of Susa whose name was Mordecai ben Jair ben Shimei ben Kish, a *Benjaminite*" (Esth 2:6). Kish was the name of King Saul's father,[18] while Mordecai's enemy is called Haman, an Agagite. Notably, it was the failure to kill Agag that initiated Saul's downfall (1 Sam 15; there are no such people as "Agagites"). So,

the most usual term for them is "Israel." The portrait might reflect the expanded Hasmonean territory of Judah, which took in what had once been "Samaria" (see 1:9 and 4:4).

16. See Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

17. For a range of recent discussion, see Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt, and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, eds, *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

18. Shimei was the name of another Benjaminite of Saul's family who cursed David; see 2 Sam 16; 19; and 1 Kgs 2.

Mordecai is not only Benjaminite, but is implicated very closely with the figure of Saul and in a fashion exacting a belated revenge on his behalf. Calling him "Judean," therefore, is a dreadful irony, even a slur, rather like calling a Scot "English" or a Canadian "American." It was presumably acceptable for the writer of this story to call a Benjaminite a "Jew" (i.e. "Judean"), but was Saul of Tarsus himself content with this equation? If not, it was a theological distinction, and also a tribal one that mattered.

Are we reading too much into Paul's own words? Psychoanalysis of historical figures is almost as dubious as it is of literary characters. But we have a little data to work with. Paul was not a Judean in the geographical sense, if he was, as Luke has him assert twice, born and brought up in Tarsus. His parents named him "Saul," which suggests that they took seriously their (or at least the father's) Benjaminite identity. But King Saul appears in 1 Samuel (and in all ancient commentators) as a villain. Did the parents of this child—and the child himself—regard the ancient Israelite king as a villain—as most Judeans surely did—or, rather, did they see him more positively?

Indeed, Saul *does* have a more favourable reputation in the Bible. While the books of Samuel give the impression that his line disappeared (with a little help from David's followers), 1 Chr 8:33–40 gives a genealogy that includes the descendants of Saul within the list of descendants of Benjamin. We find the family listed again in 9:35. As for the story of his reign, we are told nothing of it before the last fatal battle except that he died because of his "treachery" or "disobedience" (Hebrew *mʿl*), as a result of which "Yhwh put him to death and turned the kingdom over the David son of Jesse" (10:14). But the subsequent tensions between Judah and Israel, and between the houses of David and Saul, are likewise omitted. Saul's family members came over to David (12:29) and, finally, in 1 Chr 26:28, the booty gained by Saul in his battle was added to that of Samuel and Joab to help maintain the Jerusalem temple. Saul is not a hero to the author of Chronicles, but neither is he a villain; the Chronicler also goes to some lengths to embrace not just the tribe of Benjamin (which, unlike the author of Kings, he often mentions separately alongside Judeans within the kingdom of Judah), but also Saul's own family. Saul was rejected by God, but did not persecute David, and his family not only survived, but lived harmoniously with the subjects of David's royal descendants. This portrait suggests that a kinder memory of Saul, his tribe and family, also existed. Indeed, it can be argued that the reference to Saul in Acts 13 follows the story in Chronicles rather than in Kings—and perhaps the Benjaminite memory of their hero, the first king of Israel.

When the second Saul, after his Pharisaic graduation, persecuted the followers of the "son of David," did the biblical stories of Saul and David escape him entirely? Or was he, like Mordecai, striking a blow in King Saul's defense?

Saul/Paul on "Son of David"

Whether or not we feel we know enough to answer this last question, we know at any rate that Luke's Paul was proud of King Saul and that Paul's own letters show him a proud Israelite and Benjaminite. How, then, does he see the "son of David"? His usual mode of reference is "Jesus Christ," or "Christ Jesus." *Christos* is the common Greek translation of Hebrew *mashiaḥ*, at least according to the Septuagint, and it is also the usual style of reference of all New Testament writers outside the Gospels (it only occurs twice in Mark and twice in John [three if we include 4:25]). Jewish readers or hearers of Paul's letters (or non-Jews familiar with the scriptures in Greek) would have understood *Christos* to mean "anointed one," "messiah." To others it would be puzzling and probably regarded as a proper name. Paul would have known its meaning, but he makes no other kind of allusion to Jesus as a messiah, as we might have expected him to do for the benefit of his non-Jewish addressees. He leaves *Christos* quite unexplained.

But he goes further. On the one occasion when he might speak of Jesus' messianic status, he is very guarded: "the gospel concerning [God's] son," he says, "who was descended from David *according to the flesh*" (Rom 1:3). A careless exegete might take this form of words as emphasizing the *legitimacy* of Jesus' "messianic" title. But the opposite is more likely. Paul is nowhere else interested in "son of David" as a messianic title, and what he means here is that "son of David" means that Jesus was descended from David: no more. If Paul means to emphasize anything at all, it is Jesus' *non-human* nature, his divinity. He is aware that Jesus is called "son of David," though whether he knew anything of the (differing) genealogies and birth narratives found in Matthew and Luke is improbable. At any rate, Paul's only allusion to the title "son of David" understands it in a purely biological sense, and his other two references to David in Rom 4:6 and 11:9 follow Acts in treating him as a prophet.[19]

There remains now the question of the kingdom. We noted already that in Acts some hint of a link between the *historical* kingdom of David

19. The Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles is debated, but 2 Tim 2:8 in any case conforms to Rom 1:3: "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David."

(*and Saul*) and the kingdom of God was proclaimed. There are no such hints in Paul's own letters: he does refer to the "kingdom" often, and only once does he use the phrase "kingdom of God" (see Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20, 6:9–10; 15:24, 50; Gal 5:21; 2 Thess. 1:5; the exception is 1 Thess 2:12; "his [sc. God's] own kingdom').[20] So, perhaps Paul is totally unaware of any replaying of the Saul and David story in his own career, such as Luke is hinting at—or, having once been aware of it, but having seen Jesus as a divine apparition, he has now changed his mind.

Conclusion

This study can only be very brief! A case for Luke having reflected or constructed a degree of typology between the two biblical figures of Saul and David and Paul and Jesus is not at all improbable, and what we know of Paul would suggest that the account in Acts 13:13–41 is a plausible reflection of what he would have said. The letters, on the other hand, show that Paul, who must have been perfectly aware of the meaning of the title "son of David," insists that this is a matter only of human descent. His "son of David" is not a messiah, only someone called "Christ."

As with many intertextual comparisons and psychological profiles, this treatment of Saul and Paul leads us only to tentative conclusions. But in pursuing it, some interesting features have emerged. If, like another famous Benjaminite "prophet to the nations," Saul/Paul was not exactly called from the womb (Jer 1:5), his identity was stamped by his descent and by his name. Had he not been a Saul, would his encounter with the "son of David" have worked out as it did?

20. 2 Tim 4:1 and 18, however, allude to a kingdom of "Christ Jesus" and "the Lord" respectively, a usage sufficiently distinctive to buttress the doubts of those who regard these letters as not (at least wholly) authentic.

Part III

SINGING DAVID

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The Sharper Harper (1 Samuel 16:14–23): Iconographic Reflections on David's Rise to Power*

Carole R. Fontaine

It is hard to imagine the biblical world without David—we might have had to invent a David had we not found one ready-made. Small and ruddy, handsome and charming, he is perhaps an unlikely successor to the out-sized, mighty men who preceded him. Thanks to the literary vision and energy of scholars like David Gunn and others in this volume, the landscape of biblical studies has shifted to a more open, frankly eclectic approach which eschews the worst of earlier historical methodologies—with considerable impact on the stories of Saul, David, and Solomon. After all, in the end, the only certain thing is the text before us.[1] It is no longer possible, at least in this writer's opinion, to speak uncritically about the historicity of David, son of Jesse—and Tel Dan be damned! So, in the spirit of uncovering what may *be* uncovered on the topic of David's rise to power, I offer these thoughts.

Introductions to David: A Triple Threat to Saul

One of the first things that strikes the reader of the books of Samuel is the strange circumstance of David's textual introduction—which is itself triune, a sign (at least to the present reader) that something fishy or wishy is going on! First, and most likely added last, is the prophetic selection of David by Samuel at YHWH's own specific urging in 1 Sam 16:1–13. We find out that the David who becomes the king after God's own heart was the youngest, and presumably shortest of Jesse's sons (via

* I would like to thank David Gunn for his wonderful harping on all matters literary and biblical, as well as his wonderful services to me as my first publisher. I would also like to thank the library staff at Andover Newton Theological School, and Faculty Assistant Jennifer Shaw for their cheerful technical assistance in the preparation of this essay.

1. Even in Texas!

the rejection of the princely sized Eliab in vv. 6–7, where we even get a proverb underwriting God's point of view). So much the baby of his family, this shepherd is easily overlooked, even by the family gathered to Samuel's *faux* sacrifice. Yet his job and his appearance clearly mark him as a future leader—such is the metaphorical weight of shepherd-hood in the ancient Near Eastern world, with texts commonly speaking of its kings as shepherds of the sheepish people beneath their rods of office. The biblical text is clear: "*this is the one!*" (v. 12), says God triumphantly.

So, if this is truly the one (and God says so!), why should we need yet two *more* introductions, O Redactors and Readers? What were they trying to tell us, other than the fact that the origins of David's rise to power are conflicted, multiple, and obscure? It is as if we are standing in a hologram in 1 Sam 16–17, so that we see many aspects of David's ascent, all at the same time. Chosen by God and prophet, David is then chosen by Saul's servants and Saul as a response to the machinations of God's spirit: good ones depart and bad ones replace them! Let there be found a skilled harper who might use the charms of music to soothe the savage breast of the soon-to-be-tragic King Saul! The preliminary "word on the street" about David prefigures leadership qualities he has yet to show, but which will resurface as themes in the theological explanation for the choices made by God and Saul. Again, we hear that David is *the one* in 1 Sam 16:18:

> One of the young men answered, "I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence; and the LORD is with him." (NRSV)

Brueggemann comments that the "Narrator is obviously presenting David's credentials for more than court musician," but does not comment further on the role of musicians in the political context of the court.[2]

Having safely ensconced David in the thick of the action at Saul's side, we find him introduced a third time in ch. 17 as a young shepherd,[3]

2. Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1990), 126. Hans W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (trans. John Bowden; OTL; London: SCM, 1964), 141–42, also comments on the two salient motifs that join the harper notices: physical beauty and skill at arms. The one is clearly evident in 1 Sam 16; we must wait until 1 Sam 17's speech and acts by David to confirm his military skills—one might note that, having no armor, he has certainly *not* attained professional status as a champion soldier.

3. David M. Gunn comments on the narrative problems in this third introduction in *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (JSOTSup 14; Sheffield: JSOT, 1980), 78–79.

too small for Saul's armor, but large enough in his theology to go up against a Philistine giant and prevail. Of course, in 2 Sam 21:19, we learn that another son of Bethlehem, Elhanan, actually killed Goliath, casting yet another net over the fishiness of our triple catch on David's advent. Our interest here is in the second introduction, where David figures as a skilled musician who can perform exorcisms of the king's evil humors.

Commentators reflect primarily on the musical introduction of David in two ways, linking it to the apotropaic use of music against demons, or its relationship to ecstatic prophecy. The latter view has been especially persuasive, in light of Saul's encounter with a guild of ecstatic prophets using music as part of their trance induction practices in 1 Sam 10:5.[4] This is a strong Levantine association of music with ecstatic prophecy, attested in art and legend: rock paintings from Amman (first century B.C.E. to fourth century C.E.) show a nude female pipe player circling the one she plays for, and the same set of motifs occur in the *Acts of the Gospel of Thomas*, which is of Syrian origin. There, a Hebrew female pipe player circles the apostle while playing, and he begins to sing, "This girl is the daughter of the light…"[5]

One might note that the "demon-coping mechanism" for David's musical ministry to Saul seems to be an explanation which is less easy for some to swallow theologically: no theologian cares to explain why a good God sent "evil spirits" to torment his former champion. Saul has lost his battle with the divine (again!) and now a harper arrives to announce a musical truce between king and spirits. Brueggemann's discussion takes the typical theological line of interpretation, showing that the narrator of David's rise and Saul's fall has skillfully crafted an accession to power which presumes that all three introductions of David have been woven into a single whole, although Brueggemann admits that 1 Sam 16:14 begins with a new piece of literature. For him, the secret call of David by Samuel *did* happen, an event which led to David's introduction as harper to Saul. This then culminates with his victory over Goliath, as "the hidden purpose of Yahweh is worked out through the awkward and raw events of historical interaction."[6] It is possible to see

4. P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel* (AB 8; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 281.

5. Joachim Braun, *Music in Ancient Israel/Palestine: Archaeological, Written, and Comparative Sources* (trans. Douglas W. Stott; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 217–19. This is the only drawing of music in performance from the general region that can be associated with a text.

6. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 119.

another impulse strongly at work, and not a theological one: both David Gunn and David Jobling's readings note that it is necessary to justify the replacement of Saul with David again and again throughout the first book of Samuel. Not only is Saul portrayed as a big bumbler who has accidentally chosen his own usurper, he's crazy *too!*[7]

However, as I will show below, harpers and their instruments figure in iconographic "type-scenes" from across the ancient Near East, displayed with bundles of motifs which lend nuance to the "harpus interruptus" episode found between 1 Sam 16:1–13 and 1 Sam 17. These iconographic notices suggest an explanation for David's mastery of political maneuvering while they musically evoke his selection as the leader who will end YHWH's war with the concept of kingship, even when his main work experience was in the sheepfolds of his father. One need not call upon theology or veer into a discussion of the psychology of Saul in order to account for David's key placement as a harper at Saul's side in his first court appearance.

Realia: Of Harps, Lyres, Origins, and Contexts

Although this essay uses the term "harper," the term derived from early translations reliant on the King James Version, in fact David's instrument (*kinnôr*) was probably the portable, "thin" lyre, held horizontally during playing. Harps and lyres may differ in many respects (see Figs. 1, 2, 3, 4).[8] These may include size, shape, thickness, number and length of strings, along with their manner of their tuning, type, and location of sound box, placement while playing (held by the performer vertically or horizontally, or placed on the floor), the use of projecting upward "arms" (the lyre) vs. the archaic "musical bow" shape of the harp which serves as the sound box. The lyre is considered a member of the zither family, and was usually strummed with a plectrum, rather than being "plucked" like a harp, though we note in 1 Sam 16:23 that David played it *bᵉyad*,

7. On Saul as a tragic figure caught in David's web, see Gunn, *Saul*, 23–31; David Jobling, *1 Samuel* (Berit Olam; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998), 88–92.

8. Pictures really *are* worth a thousand words at points. Compare the visual catalogue of harpers with lyres in Bo Lawergren, "Distinctions Among Canaanite, Philistine, and Israelite Lyres, and Their Global Lyrical Contexts," *BASOR* 309 (1998): 41–68 (44–45, 48, 50, 54, especially the "thin" lyre), with those of various harps in F. W. Galpin, "The Sumerian Harp of Ur, c. 3500 B.C.," *Music & Letters* 10 (1929): 111–12.

"by hand," like a harp.[9] Like the lute, which has a long protruding neck exiting from its sound box, the strings of the lyre are perpendicular to its sound box and, unlike the harp, they are usually all of the same length.[10]

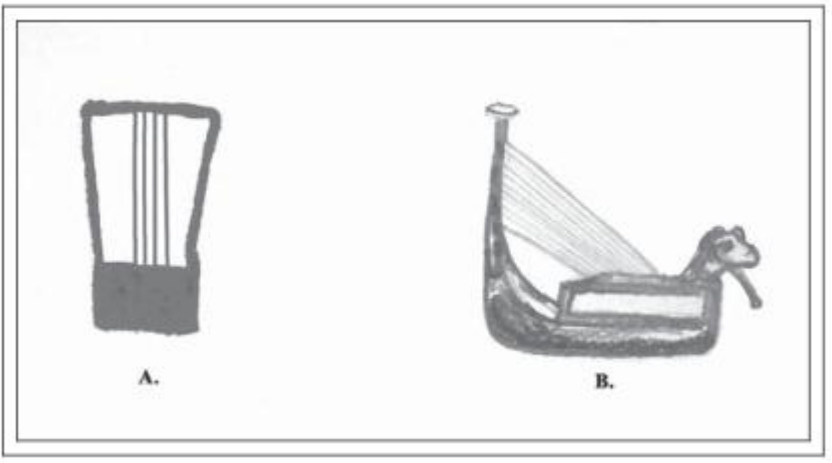

Figure 1. *Lyre (A.) vs. Harp; (B.).*
A. Beni-Hasan tomb, Egypt. "Thin" Portable Lyre, ca. 1900 B.C.E.;
B. Ur. Sumerian Harp, ca. 3500 B.C.E.
(Figure by author, after Galpin, "The Sumerian Harp of Ur," 112)

The Hebrew *kinnôr*[11] is a West Semitic term which probably refers to the so-called thin lyre which may have originated in Syria around 2500 B.C.E.;[12] an early version is pictured on the murals at the tomb of Beni-Hasan, along with a procession of goods including gazelles and ibex (see Fig. 1a).[13] Though difficult to date, rock paintings from the central Negev show two nude women playing the thin lyre, associated with a nearby quadruped (a jackal or lion), and a line of men engaging in a circle dance, while waving a scarf over the head (see Fig. 2).[14] In Ugaritic mythology, the *kinnārum* are said to be "beloved companions" of

9. For a picture of a Bronze Age plectrum from En-Gedi, see Braun, *Music in Ancient Israel/Palestine*, 164, illus. IV.31.

10. Marcelle Duchesne-Guillemin, "Music in Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt," *World Archaeology* 12 (1981): 292–95.

11. Ugaritic *kinnarum*; Egyptian *djadjat*; Greek *kithara*.

12. Lawergren, "Distinctions Among Canaanite, Philistine, and Israelite Lyres," 47–68.

13. Braun, *Music*, 78. All freehand drawings presented here are by the author, based on plates of archaeological finds published in multiple sources, and compared to one another, for presentation of particular details of the image type-scene. Plate sources may be found in *ANEP*, and Braun, *Music*.

14. Braun, *Music*, 71–75, Fig. III.1b, c.

Kothar-wa-Hasis, the god of skills[15] who was patron of the crafts of prophecy and music.[16] This may allow us to suggest an early linkage of music with the liturgics for invoking divine presence, as well as entertainment. The role of musical instruments, especially percussion items, is strongly attested in shamanic literature, which finds a sophisticated remnant in the Greek myth of Orpheus and his descent to the underworld. Relatedly, the Kotharat goddesses who make "joyful noise" may preside over childbirth, perhaps incorporating either the blessings of music as an inducer of trance or its use as a "pain-killer" or mood enhancer during a dangerous rite of passage.[17]

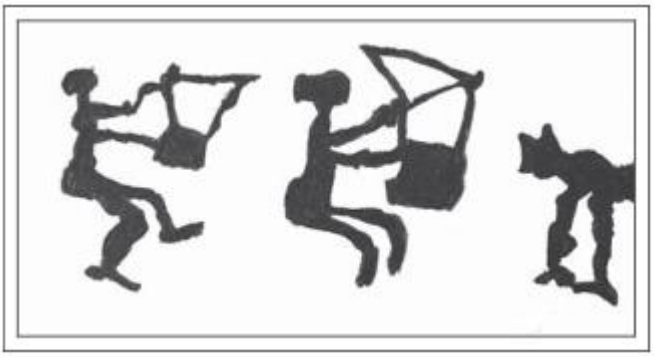

Figure 2. *Negev. Nude female lyre-players with quadruped. Rock Etchings, ca. Middle Bronze Age? (Figure by author.)*

The use of the *kinnôr* in prophetic, oracular contexts is attested throughout the Hebrew Bible, in contexts far and wide, along with other musical instruments. In late texts, we hear about the use of the *kinnôr* for musical accompaniment to stimulate or convey prophecy (1 Chr 25:3). Likewise, in military encounters, the use of singers to inspire a shift in power from one side to the other occurs in 2 Kgs 3:13–20 and 2 Chr 20:14–23. In Exod 15:20–21, Miriam and her all-girl slave band use the hand-drum or tambourine to accompany their victory song which ends with prophetic

15. Often identified with Sumerian Enki/Ea, who in turn has many characteristics also attributed to YHWH.

16. John Curtis Franklin, "The Wisdom of the Lyre: Soundings in Ancient Greece, Cyprus and the Near East," http://www.kingmixers.com/Franklin%20PDF%20files% 20copy/WisdomLyre.pdf (accessed August 4, 2008); also published in E. Hickmann, A. A. Both and R. Eichmann (eds.), *Musikarchaeologie im Kontext: Serie Studien zur Musikarchaeologie V* (Orient-Archaeologie 20; Rahden/Westf., 2006), 379–98. For the relationship between the Greek/Cypriot figure of Kinyras, whose functionaries make lamentations on lyres, see Franklin's discussion, 6–9.

17. Ibid., 8 n. 47.

reference to a future "holy abode." In Deut 31:19–22, Moses composes a song which is to be taught to the Israelites in order to guide them and interpret the future of divine interactions. This may be related to another "teaching" function where music enhances memory and rational thought. In Ps 49, the psalmist tells us that, with the *kinnôr*, he will "open" his "riddle" about the meaning of luxuries held dear and the coming of death (another context in which shepherds and sheep appear [v. 14] as well!), certainly a prophetic text for all mortal flesh. Some critics believe that the same sort of use for the *kinnôr* is implied in 1 Sam 19:20–24 and Ezek 40:44–46, on analogy with 1 Sam 10:5–6 where Samuel tells Saul that he will come upon a group of prophets making music. Their music will cause the Spirit of the Lord to come on the hapless king, making him into someone quite different. These common themes of lyre and prophecy are well-rehearsed in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes, when Hermes creates the first lyre out of a tortoise. He describes its use to Apollo (ll. 482–88):

> Whoever inquires of it,
> Having mastered it with skill and wisdom,
> To him it teaches (*didaskei*) with its utterance
> All manner of things pleasing to the mind.
> Being easily played with gentle habituation,
> Shunning long-suffering labor. But whoever in
> Ignorance inquires of it roughly and abruptly,
> Then would it babble quite hopelessly and without foundation.[18]

In the realm of the "medical" explanations of David's harping as a skilled musician who can exorcise the evil spirit from the Lord out of his king, the narrator may also be intoning a descant. Surely, David's skill holds out a kind of inverse hope to his royal employer: the handsome lad who can drive one spirit *out* with music might be able to entice a more beneficent spirit back *in*! Perhaps David is able to change spirits as easily as he will change military masters or inconvenient wives. For Saul's part, his religious or ritual notions do not hold him back in a pinch in his religious or ritual notions when he finds himself in a pinch: his trip to the Medium at En-dor shows the beset king all too ready to truck with spirits in any way necessary to get his result, even when he has previously ruled the solution out of bounds for YHWH-worshippers!

The tradition of David and his harp, of course, has been enshrined in the book of Psalms, which attributes much of its content to the traditional

18. Quoted in ibid., 5. The entire composition is available online at http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_text_homerhymn_hermes.htm (trans. H. G. Evelyn-White) (accessed September 26, 2009).

authorship of David. Subsequent literary, hymnal, and visual interpretations of David's life are replete with the image of the king with his harp, recalling the days of his less ambiguous relationship to God. Yet the shepherd who sings his psalms by night while watching over his sheep is not so far removed from the first non-anonymous poet in history, Enheduanna of Sumer. That poet composed by night, that the glories of her goddess Inanna might be sung by day.[19] Even when placed in a deserted nightscape in Lower Galilee, these images of David imply authorship and leadership, prophecy and healing in ways which resonate with very ancient iconographic and literary tropes.

The Harper Recovered: The Politics of Music in the Ancient World of the Bible

While the present writer is by no means a music specialist, any cursory survey of the public and private art of the ancient Near East and Egypt shows that the harp and lyre were important accompaniments in more than just a musical or cultic/medical register. It will be suggested here that such common iconographic contexts are also present in our Samuel text: this is the association between harping, processions of prisoners, and booty. The Royal Standard of Ur, now in the British Museum, and from the Ur III excavation of the early twentieth century, is a mosaic object of more than ancient artistic significance.[20] Here, the idea of narrative conveyed through interrelated registers obtains its full realization. The "standard" is customarily divided into two narrative scenarios, "War" and "Peace," in description of the long sides of the trapezoid. Both sides include three registers that show processions, each appropriate to the context they are representing, and action moves from the bottom register to the top. On the War side, we see Sumerian chariots pulled by onagers trampling naked enemies, dead beneath their cumbersome wheels. This is followed by a register of a procession of soldiers and prisoners of war. In the top War register, the leader, so tall in his prominence that his head breaks through the border of the register, has alighted from his chariot and awaits the presentation of prisoners and booty now approaching him from the right (action in the two lower registers proceeded from left to right). The Peace side of the standard continues with the procession of booty taken in war: onagers, sheep,

19. James Pritchard, ed., "Hymnal Prayer of Enheduanna: The Adoration of Inanna in Ur," in *ANET*, 582, ll. 139–40.

20. Dominique Collon, *Ancient Near Eastern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), Plates 50a-b, 67; Pritchard, *ANEP*, Plates 303–4, 97.

goats, and other useful animals, including fish, move from left to right on the bottom two registers, as bearers with great sacks on booty on their backs proceed to the top register with the provisions needed to celebrate the victory portrayed on the War side. Again, the top register exchanges the order of the action, moving from right to left, where the great leader, now seated in ritual gear, again soars through the enclosing border that contains other mere mortals. The "first" (or, depending on one's perspective, "last") standing/moving human to lead the procession to the group of seated dignitaries who are drinking and enjoying themselves is a harper playing a Bull Lyre (a prototype of which has been found at the site and reconstructed[21]). He carries the portable lyre with his right arm; he plays the strings with his left.

It is clear from relationship between the two sides of the standard that the transitions between War and Peace are accompanied by music made on strings. The harper is a distinctive part of the Peace scene, for his appearance demarcates the shift from procession to feast, from prisoners to captors. The warrior king, who was presented with prisoners in the War tableau, is now feted with music. A "new space" that enforces orderly processions and tunes upon the former chaos of war is created for the group who listen to the lyrical denouement of battle. We should not be surprised, then, that more than a millennium later, the Assyrian Empire takes special care to keep harpers alive, and sends them into exile along with their instruments, even giving us a picture of the harpers of Lachish exiled with their lyres.[22] To the victors go the tunes.

Closer to "home" in Syro-Palestine, an incised ivory tablet from Late Bronze Age Megiddo (see Fig. 3 [A]) shows a similar scene, including the narrative progress from War to Peace.[23] Attended by a small human figure on the far right, a rather Egyptian-looking prince is in his chariot (with horse), shown beneath a winged sun disc. He is seen marching naked prisoners[24] before him into the scene of the feast on the left, which celebrates the victory. On the left side of the narrative of the action, the leader now appears seated in a sphinx throne, with a flying bird behind his throne. This is followed by an attendant, a pot containing two small quadrupeds, and a final attendant. Midway between War on the right and Peace on the left, two women appear. The first is in elaborate headdress and robe, and offers the conquering prince a lotus, while wiping his

21. Pritchard, *ANEP*, Plate 205, p. 64; Plate 193, p. 61.

22. Ibid., Plate 205, p. 64. For the sort of song captives would *like* to play their captors, see Ps 137.

23. Ibid., Plate 332, p. 111.

24. They look very similar to Egyptian monumental portraits of the Shasu.

dripping (ritual?) bowl with her head scarf. Directly behind her, a less well-garbed woman plays a nine-string portable lyre, holding it under her left arm.[25] Beneath her *kinnôr*, a bird is flying upward. She is separated by vegetal motifs from the kilted soldier behind her who leads the naked prisoners tied to the leader's chariot. The princely leader, then, is shown "twice," another form of "social perspective" typical to Egyptian depictions of important personages.[26] On the right, he is preceded by the two naked captive warriors; in the middle, two women stand before him, and two male attendants serve him from behind the throne on the left, giving us a chiasm of visual elements similar to the action on the Standard of Ur. The other visual elements, including three ducks on the Feast side of the ivory, a winged sun, as well as the lion's and a gazelle's head emerging from the top of a huge storage pot behind the throne, suggest a cultic scene, perhaps in honor of Anat/Astarte according to some interpreters of this scene.[27] Again, the figure of the harper separates the prisoners from the elites. For our purposes, I simply note the music belongs to the feast, but it is clear that the motive for the feast is victory in battle.

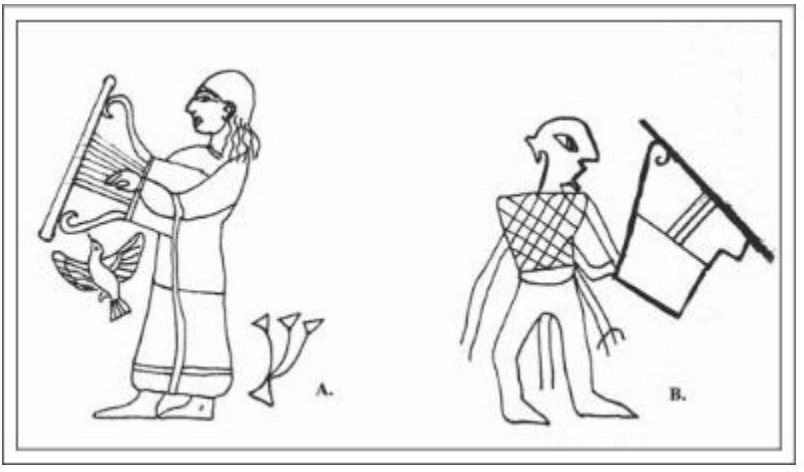

Figure 3. *Megiddo Harpers.*
A. Female lyre-player. Incised Ivory, Iron IA.
B. Male lyre-player. Painted Vessel, Iron IA
(Figure by author.)

25. This is the same unusual position that will next be noted in Assyrian palace reliefs of the Judean harpers exiled from Lachish!

26. See my *With Eyes of Flesh: The Bible, Gender, and Human Rights* (The Bible in the Modern World 10; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008), 44–46, for discussion of the ideological purposes behind this kind of representation of the "Big Man."

27. Braun, *Music*, 96.

Finds from our region in the Iron Age yield more evidence of the harping tradition and its associations with power in war, cult, or apotropaic energies. A painted vessel from Stratum VI A (first half of the eleventh century) of Megiddo (see Fig. 3 [B]) shows the procession with harper motif, *sans* prisoners of war in this instance. A procession consisting of a lion, a segmented creature, a caprid, and a male harper playing a portable lyre, is followed by a scorpion or crab, a horse, fish, and bird, all moving toward an enormous stylized lotus (an image which has "drifted" into 1 Kgs 5:12–13 perhaps?). Keel speculates that the lotus may well represent a symbol for a stylized tree, as an "artificial" cult symbol of the tree goddess, often understood as Asherah in the West-Semitic pantheon.[28] While the procession may be simply cultic in nature, the animal parade evokes the other "booty" based processions with harpers mentioned above. Due to the fragmentary nature of this artifact, more cannot be said, but one is put in mind of the two "processions" of provisions and animals which Jesse sends with David to King Saul in 1 Sam 16:20 and its *inclusio* in 1 Sam 17:17–18, as well as the plunder taken from the Philistine camp in 1 Sam 17:53 after the death of Goliath.

Another related find, a rectangular bronze stand from Kurion in Cyprus (not shown), shows a four-sided tribute to a stylized tree (either symbolizing a tree goddess or her sanctuary). On each of three sides, a worshipper presents gifts to the same palm tree figure: a fish, a length of cloth, and a copper ingot. On the fourth side, a seated male plays a genuine harp before the tree.[29] Here we have less reason to suppose that war booty is necessarily involved in these offerings, since we see no processions, weapons, prisoners, or other symbols of military power, so this image is to be connected most probably to liturgical traditions of music-making as a sacred and pleasing offering to one's deity, rather than a War–Peace continuum.

More Connections: Harpers, Hands, Heads, and Blessings

Finds from the Judean desert at Kuntillet ʿAjrud rehearse similar themes to those above during the time when both the nation states of Judah and Israel can be confidently located in history. Pithos A from this "outback" caravanserai shows three figures in conjunction with an inscription (which may not actually belong with the images since there is overlap

28. Othmar Keel, *Goddesses and Trees, New Moon and Yahweh: Ancient Near Eastern Art and the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 261; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 39–40; see Fig. 68, p. 139.

29. Ibid., 40; see Fig. 69 a-d on p. 140.

between the two elements). Two foreground male figures in Egyptian headdresses sport the animal tail and skins familiar from the Egyptian apotropaic genie Bes, the dwarf god, who protects pregnant women and their children during childbirth. To the right and "up behind" the reduplicated Bes figures on a different plane, a seated figure with stylized breasts plays a portable lyre (see Fig. 4).

Figure 4. *Pithos A, Kuntillet ʿAjrud. Detail of seated lyre-player, ca. 800 B.C.E. (Figure by author.)*

Bes is well associated with music, it being one of his "working" tools. Sometimes described as a "gnome," "lion-man," or even the symbol of the fetus who protects its mother, Bes is often imaged in multiple views (that is, reduplicated) in Egyptian art, accounting for his double appearance on Pithos A. He is shown playing musical instruments (lyre, tambourine, or flute), dancing, jesting, or fiercely flourishing weapons to wave off evil, and he appears in the Ptolemaic Hathor Temple playing a harp (not a lyre) at Philea, near Aswan.[30] Also significant, Bes is

30. H. te Velde, "Bes," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (ed. Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and P.W. van der Horst; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 330–31. For an image of Bes harping at Philea, see Liliana Osses Adams, "Notes of a Harpist (II): Harp of Gods and Pharaohs, Priests and Priestesses," http://www.zwoje-scrolls.com/zwoje39/text07p.htm (accessed October 16, 2007).

sometimes shown with a huge phallus, probably magical in nature and designed to stimulate fertility. The inscription on Pithos A, beneath one of the Bes' headdresses, reads "X says: say to Yehal[lel'el] and to Yo'ash and [to Z]: I bless you by Yahweh of Samaria and his asherah."[31] Remarkably, the same constellation of elements, including the lyre, appear on fourth-century B.C.E. Samaritan coins.[32]

Problems with the interpretation of this mid-ninth- to mid-eighth-century find are legion. It is not clear, as noted above, if the inscription is intended in any way to relate to the figures shown. Nor is it clear, for grammatical reasons, that the "asherah" so mentioned actually refers to a humanoid figure at all, rather than to a cult object. If the inscription is related to the figures, why is Bes imaged with a seated goddess Asherah, rather than YHWH? Why do the figures violate the single register to show a totally anomalous position for the lyre player, who seems to face sideways, rather than frontally as is typical? Since one of the Bes figures is also shown with stylized breasts, it cannot be said for certain that the seated figure is actually female: hair arrangements in this crude sketch could also be indications of a typical male Egyptian wig, according to Hadley, and if it *is* female and/or Asherah the goddess, why does she appear with the apotropaic Bes, and in musical associations which are common for Bes but not for the tree goddess.[33] Further, it is not clear what the purpose of the drawings might be in the context of the site: were there many pregnant mothers on the road or at the rest stop giving birth, such that Bes and a mother-goddess might be drafted by locals for a little divine support?

All this granted, we simply need to note that we have, during biblical times, a harper—male or female—with a portable lyre, playing in a context that includes twin figures of Bes, the musical, misshapen protector of childbirth, associated with an inscription about Yahweh and his asherah. Not only is music—and hence the lyre which is Syro-Palestine's most dominant instrument in the Iron Age—appropriate to Bes scenes and attested widely,[34] we have also seen that harping before one's victorious leader or one's deity is a common cultural activity. We may not be able to solve the full issues of identity and meaning, but we *do have* clear

31. Judith Hadley, "From Goddess to Literary Construct: The Transformation of Asherah into Hokmah," in *A Feminist Companion to Reading the Bible: Approaches, Methods, Strategies* (ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine; 2d Series; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 369–73.

32. Braun, *Music*, 152–53.

33. Hadley, "From Goddess," 371–72.

34. Braun, *Music*, 151.

evidence of the importance of harping as a motif associated with protection and blessing from the time of biblical kingdoms.

Another apotropaic context for Asherah, whether goddess or cult object, comes from another artifact from Judah near Hebron, this time from Khirbet el-Qom, in a cave burial dated to approximately 750 B.C.E. which may relate to our passage about David. On the cave walls at Khirbet el-Qom, we find scratched upon the tomb wall the image of a human hand held out and down, very much like the "hand of Fatima" or "Hand of God" amulet familiar from the Near East from ancient times until this very day. A poorly preserved inscription reads "Uriyahu the rich wrote it. Blessed be Uriyahu by Yahweh (and) by his asherah, for from his enemies he has saved him…by Oniyahu by his asherah and by his *a[she]rah*."[35] A quick survey of the few images of lyres and harps presented in this essay confirms that hands are often portrayed (and this holds true for the entire corpus of such images), and it has been noted above that the Canaanite *kinnôr* is played with a plectrum, rather than "by hand," the method apparently preferred by David according to our texts.

The use of "hand" in our harper passage, of course, evokes a far more powerful image than a harper with sore fingers because his plectrum has been misplaced. It is the "hand" of God or the Lord which determines much of the action in 1 Samuel. It presses heavily on the Philistines who took the Ark of the Covenant as booty, to their dismay: it causes an outbreak of tumors, probably swollen glands in the loins, or hemorrhoids, in 1 Sam 5:9, 11. In 1 Sam 7:13, the hand of the Lord is relentlessly against the Philistines, accounting for their history of miseries. In 1 Sam 12:15, the hand of the Lord will be set against the people Israel and their king should they stray from the paths of their God. One way to describe Saul's malaise after his rejection by God and Samuel in 1 Sam 15 would be to say that the "Lord's hand was heavy upon him," though the text does not choose to employ this idiom. No wonder David needs to play "by hand," using it symbolically as well as musically to cast out his master's ill humors.

Beyond this textual play, hands as images or literary tropes are often depicted as a metonym for the whole worshipper in a gesture of adoration on memorial stones, according to Hadley. This function fits well with the burial context of Khirbet el-Qom where the deceased would want to be "remembered" as dutiful worshippers of their god. However, the mention of enemies and rescue in conjunction with the hand that

35. Hadley, "From Goddess," 364–66.

wards off evil and YHWH's *asherah* (whatever that may be) reminds us that modern assignments of meaning must always remain fluid due to their conjectural nature. It is *not* out of bounds to consider that the image of the hand representing divine protection is similar to the presence of the Bes as the medical/liturgical friend to the harper who stands in a liminal zone between struggle and celebration, warding off harm, and enemies while mediating blessing, just as David wards off Saul's bleak spirits. This gives us an active link between the images on finds from Khirbet el-Qom (hand, enemies, Yahweh and asherah, protection) and Kuntillet 'Ajrud (lyre-player with hand on lyre, apotropaic Bes figures, Yahweh and asherah blessing), and our Davidic musical traditions (lyre, hand, evil spirits from Yahweh, departure of spirits). Harpers not only celebrate and invoke, say the artifacts; they may also protect—perhaps by soothing the angry deity as much as the evil spirits inhabiting persons—in wars with enemies, or its female equivalent, childbirth, as Bes so often does.

Heady Knowledge: What Did the Harper Know and When Did He Know It?

One final scene rounds out our survey of art depicting harpers in a court setting (see Fig. 1), though many others exist. This is the so-called Assyrian Garden Party of King Ashurbanipal's North Palace at Nineveh, dated to about 650 B.C.E. (see Fig. 5). This scene shows the final outcome of the Assyrian campaign against the Elamites under King Teumman, who was captured and beheaded with his son at the battle of Til Tuba. Here his distinctive[36] detached head becomes an object of fun and grisly display at a pleasant royal feast. Its final destiny is to hang from a tree in Ashurbanipal's pleasure garden as he sups with his queen and attendants, some of whom are humiliated enemies forced to act as servants to their conquerors. Much is typically made of this Garden Party: it is one of the few depictions to be had of queens of Assyria; it also presents a moment of "leisure" between the royal couple, and exalts the notion of the elite pleasure garden in which "reclining banquets" take place. Incense and fans are waved, at least in part to control the smell of rotting human flesh, as birds flit through trees, and vines twine to make a charming bower.

36. He is known by the balding hairline, which is shown in earlier scenes from battle.

Figure 5. *Ashurbanipal's Garden Party. Detail: Harper with Teumman's Hanging Head. Nineveh Palace Relief, seventh century B.C.E. (Figure by author, after Collon.*[37]*)*

What is of interest for our purposes is the placement of the harper, since such a relaxing scene of enjoyment apparently could not be conducted without musical accompaniment, for all the reasons I have noted above. He does not lead or show the culmination of the presentation of prisoners and booty (though he is positioned closest to the hanging head), nor is he needed to soothe away the evil spirits which might naturally afflict a tired king in the aftermath of successful battles. Rather, our harper (on a real harp this time, rather than a lyre) stands directly next to the tree from which Teumman's head is displayed, so that he not only gets an "eyeful" but also a nose-full of the outcome of political maneuvers. While he does

37. Dominique Collon, *Ancient Near Eastern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 146–51, Fig. 120.

not take a position as near to the royal couple as some other attendants, he is nevertheless well placed in the court, lurking legitimately near the throne of power. Again, his presence marks transition from war to peace, a symbolic move in David's appearance as harper as well: Israel has been losing under Saul; now things will be different with David.

David the Chosen in the Royal Court is a narrative marked by decapitated heads, a subset of the motif of display of captured prisoners. He cuts off Goliath's head as proof of his victory, "by hand" just as he plays his lyre "by hand" in 1 Sam 17:46, 51, and 57. Later Saul's head is cut off and presumably displayed at his disastrous military action at Mount Gilboa, in 1 Sam 31:9. In David's own court, the heads and body parts of enemies also make their appearance: those who kill Saul's heir Ishbaal, thinking to curry favor with David, cut off his head and present it to him in 2 Sam 4:8, only to be killed and have their own bodies mutilated and displayed. The harper stationed next to the head in Ashurbanipal's garden is not the only one to have taken the grisly lessons to heart.

What might such a musician overhear, conclude, or speculate while performing his duties? One can only wonder. Harpers were clearly an indispensable part of court life, liturgical life, and figure consistently in the aftermath of battles in processions and feasts which celebrate the victors. One need not go so far as to look for "evil spirits" in such banquet scenes which feature humiliation of prisoners and display of bodily trophies. One need only look to the royal couch for the origin of the evils that collude to make one person into a trophy and the other into its owner. The sharper harper sees it all, and puts that knowledge to good use.

Back to David: Why a Harper?

My survey of portraits of harpers performing on lyres in the southern Levant and neighboring states has shown that the *kinnôr* is well attested visually outside of its 42 mentions in the Hebrew Bible. The most easily defended dates for the use of this small, easily carried lyre range from the Middle Bronze Age down into late antiquity. Hence, we cannot use the data presented here to establish any kind of historicity or general epoch for the *authorship* of 1 Sam 16:14–23. However, the present discussion does add a significant component to our *contextual* understanding of the motifs surfacing in the stories of David's rise to power in Saul's court. Moving beyond the Hebrew Bible's clear connections with treatment of demonic possession or use of music in ecstatic prophecy, we see that the careful narrator has other themes on his mind by bringing David to Saul in the form of a harper.

Most commentators looking at David's introduction to Saul's court assume that the story of David the Player is an intratextual narrative play on the traditions about David and the Psalms, or Saul's encounter with ecstatic prophets making music. More likely than the theological introduction of Samuel's anointing of the young shepherd, and less suspect than the account of the death of Goliath, since the text itself gives another character credit for that event, the harper narrative stands out as an interesting variation on David's call to kingship. We have seen that the harper is a stock figure in court life of the elite of Syro-Palestine and its neighbors, in victory processions, in banquets, liturgical celebrations, and even military prophecies. However, we can also add a further pointed political dimension to this iconographic background of David's advent at Saul's court.

The harper, no matter the reason he or she might be called into the royal presence, is well placed to observe the ins and outs of court intrigue, military strategies, and ideological manipulation of the divine on behalf of the king and cult. Quite literally, the harper stands beside power, and sees its morbid outcomes in the form of prisoners captured, trophies taken, and goods acquired. No one has yet accounted practically for the mechanisms by which a humble but opportunistic shepherd becomes a wily biblical king after YHWH's own heart, one known for doing away with his enemies in myriad crafty ways, including taking and receiving heads. Standing at his king's side, perhaps forgotten from time to time in the mix of court comings and goings, yet serving a variety of purposes, David has access to a world of knowledge not known to him from pasturing his animal flock. The "David as harper" motif does more than give us an interesting story about folk-cures for depression as it sets up the future plot developments in the life of the troubled Saul. More importantly, it evokes a range of activities in the life of a state and its social and ideological functions, all of them important for a usurper to master and master well. How did David get so sharp that he became more skilled in the world of political machinations than the king he served?

He kept his head, and harped.

David and the Psalms: Titles, Poems, and Stories

Robert C. Culley

At some stage when psalms were first being gathered, the collectors appeared to assume that David had composed many of the psalms because the phrase "of David" (or "by David") in several titles seems to designate David as their author. Indeed, for some psalms (Pss 3; 7; 18; 34; 51; 52; 54; 56; 57; 59; 60; 63; and 143), comments were added to the titles that connected the psalms to stories of David in the books of Samuel as though they described the situations in the life of David in which they were composed. While few scholars today argue for Davidic authorship, the use of these titles does bring together two kinds of literature on the subject of danger and rescue, that is, individual complaint psalms in the Psalter and stories about David in the books of Samuel. So, it may be worthwhile considering what happens when these two ways of talking about danger and rescue, the poems and the stories, are set side by side.

In what follows, then, I would like to explore the kind of interplay produced between these psalms and these stories. Both the poems and the stories deal with a person in danger from an enemy or enemies, but they explore the problem in different ways so that together they present a more complex picture of the theme of rescue. While the psalms listed above are mostly complaints by an individual appealing to God for rescue from a difficult situation (frequently enemies), they offer few clues about the identity of the petitioner or specific details about the exact nature of the difficult situation. In contrast, the stories about David in the books of Samuel are, like most narratives, replete with details about the difficult situation of David facing an enemy, always identified and usually Saul. Thus a simple connection of a psalm with a story is not at all obvious. Even so, the collectors who supplied the titles seemed to think that the stories provided a context for these psalms that otherwise lacked specific clues to persons and situations. They were using the titles as keys for reading and understanding the Psalms.

Many have made suggestions about the connection between the psalms and the stories. Brevard S. Childs concluded that the process was one of inner-biblical interpretation that rests on "general parallels between the situation described in the Psalm and some incident in the life of David" which later developed into midrash.[1] Elieser Slomovic describes the addition of titles as "connective midrash" based on "linguistic and thematic analogies as well as a congruity of images."[2] Others have contributed to this discussion and extended its scope considerably. All are interested in two issues: (1) why these particular psalms and stories were connected and (2) the implications for interpretation of putting the stories and psalms together. My interest is in the latter and so I am offering an approach to the second question.

Before exploring how these linked stories and poems deal with the individual in difficulty, we will need to mention a preliminary matter. I am going to suggest that both the poems and stories are each expressed in a traditional style. By this I mean that one can observe a certain redundancy that appears as repeated yet varied language in the psalms and repeated yet varied patterns in the stories. If the style is traditional, then in a sense we are dealing with all of the complaints as a group because they all share a body of common phrases. Similarly, there is a group of comparable stories about danger and rescue beyond the ones mentioned in the titles and these are all related by similar story patterns. The presence of these extended fields of reference broadens the relationship between stories and poems. Not only have collectors linked a particular psalm with a story, but each psalm belongs to a group of similar psalms and the same is true of the stories. Thus by implication through their variations the groups bring together a more complex view of the theme of rescue. In other words, the stories and the poems are traditional and can be looked upon as bundles of texts that can produce rather rich networks of meaning because of the varied repetition of patterns.

There are, of course, other ways of reading these psalms and stories, but the idea of such traditional texts has some basis in the study of oral tradition. Density of recurring phrases and repetition of story patterns are not uncommon in orally composed texts. Furthermore, this traditional style becomes so well established in oral tradition that it seems to continue when persons begin to use writing to compose the same kind of texts. Such texts, composed in writing but using oral traditional style,

1. Brevard S. Childs, "Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis," *JSS* 16 (1971): 137–50.

2. Elieser Slomovic, "Toward an Understanding of the Formation of Historical Titles in the Book of Psalms," *ZAW* 91 (1979): 350–80.

have been called oral-derived texts. Thus, the term "traditional" can apply to texts composed orally but also to texts composed in writing but displaying elements of a traditional oral style. The issue is not whether the texts to be examined below were composed orally or in writing, but whether they show signs of a style that is traditional in the sense I have just described. I will say more about traditional language when we look at the poems and stories below.

The psalms with historical titles will be reviewed first, followed by the stories to which the titles seem to refer.

The Poems

First, the poems. In order to keep this contribution within reasonable bounds, I have chosen to consider only Pss 142, 54, 56, 57, and 59 (in that order, based on amount of traditional language used). They all belong to that larger group of psalms, mentioned above, usually called "complaints of the individual," which have many features in common. Complaint psalms are traditional poems in the sense I have just described. The prayers have a similar pattern in that they all seek rescue from danger, especially enemies, sickness, and death. They often use similar language and imagery to describe these troubles. In the poems just listed, the problem is always enemies. Calling these psalms traditional does not mean that they simply conform to a pattern and are merely clichés. Rather, these psalms vary considerably and seem to be playing with and exploiting the possibilities of the traditional language, imagery, and structures. The complaint psalms we now have in the Psalter form a very small collection, under fifty psalms. A larger body of complaint psalms might well show up more common, traditional language, but we can only work with what he have. In order to illustrate the traditional nature of these poems, I will simply go through them briefly, touching on the main elements in each psalm, such as how the problem or difficult situation is described and what is asked of the deity. The usual textual problems and difficulties will not be discussed. This description will try to give some indication of how each complaint is like the others but also different.

Psalm 142

Of the selected psalms, this psalm has the highest amount of recurring language. I have estimated that traditional language, phrases recurring one or more times elsewhere, in the same or varied from, may be as high as two thirds of the poem. The psalm begins with the speaker in distress appealing to be heard. His distress is identified to some extent in vv. 4 and 5 (Eng. vv. 3 and 4), but only vaguely. Persons unnamed have set a

trap for him on his path. It is not uncommon to portray opponents or enemies as hunters or trappers. The speaker calls upon Yahweh to look and see that the petitioner stands alone without anyone in whom he can seek refuge or who will look out for him. He affirms that he has cried to God, who is his refuge and on whom he depends, in this life and calls out again that Yahweh hear. He then calls out that Yahweh should rescue him from pursuers who are more powerful than he is. He asks to be brought out of prison (if that is what the word means here) so that he may thank Yahweh. He closes on the reassuring note that Yahweh will indeed look after him.

Psalm 142 is similar to many other complaints. The language is often cryptic, although as traditional language it must have been familiar to listeners to whom it might have said much more than the words signal to us. Still, much is left unexplained. The difficult situation seems to involve opponents who threaten the speaker, but who they are or why they are hostile is not made explicit. It is taken for granted that Yahweh can help, but that he needs to be persuaded through prayer in which appeals of various kinds are made and in which descriptions of his distress are given. The language about the difficult situation in complaints is clearly figurative. The situation is expressed in language about hunters, pursuers, and prison (?), which could cover so many situations real and imagined. That God will indeed help is rarely left in doubt.

Psalm 54

As many as half of the phrases in this psalm occur elsewhere at least once. This psalm has many of the elements often found in complaints. It opens with a direct appeal for rescue followed by a prayer for hearing. Help is needed because of "strangers" who have risen up against the petitioner, powerful ones who have sought his life and not set God before them. This is all that is said about the threat from opponents, only mentioned in vv. 2, 5, and 9 (Eng. 3, 4, and 7). The supplicant asks that God turn this harm back on the opponents and destroy them. The language suggests a forceful intervention. This brief psalm closes with a vow on the part of the petitioner to sacrifice and offer thanksgiving to Yahweh. This is followed by a statement that the deity has rescued him and allowed him to gloat in triumph over his enemies. This last affirmation views the rescue, appealed for at the beginning of the psalm, as having already happened. Similar statements occur a few times in complaint psalms and are often described as "certainty of hearing," it amounts to a strong affirmation that the rescue will indeed happen.

Psalm 56

This psalm has a lower level of identifiable traditional language, about twenty percent. The difficulty experienced by the speaker is indicated at the start, but is described variously as a man who annoys him, a fighter who oppresses him, enemies who bother him, and many fighters. The description shifts from singular to plural and identifies persons who are hostile to the speaker, and apparently dangerous. They make plans against him, but what they are remains obscure (vv. 2, 3 [Eng. 1, 2]). More is said about the opponents (vv. 6, 7 [Eng. 5, 6]). They show hostility, making plans against him, watching his steps, and hoping for his life.

The speaker's plea is simple: deliver me. But, curiously, he asks that God bring down "peoples" in anger. This appears to broaden the perspective from a narrow focus, that is local enemies, to the broad focus of peoples. This shift of perspective, not unusual in complaints, lacks further explanation or development. The petitioner also asks that his tears be placed in God's bottle. Many other statements affirm his trust in God. He is certain that God will intervene so that his enemies will be suitably dealt with. The psalm ends with a vow to offer thanks and a statement that his life has indeed been rescued from death, an expression of certainty, indicating that he will again walk in the light of the living.

Psalm 57

This psalm is unusual in that vv. 8–12 (Eng. 7–11) are the same as Ps 108:2–6 (Eng. 1–4). About thirty percent of Ps 57 is found elsewhere. The psalm opens with the petitioner's appeal to God to be gracious and, after statements about his positive relationship with God, concludes after a few lines with a wish that God would send from the heavens to save the supplicant by putting his opponents into confusion. Only at this point (v. 5 [Eng. 4]) does he describe these opponents, if indeed this is meant to describe the opponents. He says that he will lie down in the midst of lions, with teeth like spears and arrows and tongues like sharp swords. The image soon shifts to that of hunters. They have set a net for the speaker and dug a pit into which they themselves have fallen. The last few verses, which also appear in Ps 108, fit well here because they function like an extended vow to praise and thank God in anticipation that the request for rescue will be answered. It is interesting that the speaker announces that he will sing his thanks among peoples and nations, broadening the perspective similarly to what happened at one point in Ps 56.

Psalm 59

This psalm is longer than the others and has proportionally less identifiable repeated phrases, although like the previous psalms it is a plea for rescue from opponents and contains many of the elements usually found in complaints, such as a description of a dire situation caused by enemies, appeals for help, affirmations of trust in and reliance on God, and a vow to praise God after the rescue. The persons from which the speaker wants to be rescued are described in the same vague terms encountered in the previous psalms. They are portrayed as enemies, ones who rise up against the supplicant, evildoers, bloodthirsty and powerful men, who set an ambush for him. They are pictured as dogs that circulate in the city during the evening, spewing from their mouths, with swords for lips. Insisting that he bears no blame for this dangerous situation, the petitioner urges the deity to wake up and punish all the nations (the wider perspective again). Yahweh will deride and scorn the peoples (see Ps 2:4). He asks that God let him look in triumph at his opponents and offers opinions on how they should be dealt with. The psalm ends with a vow to praise God for the expected rescue, confident that God is his protector.

In this brief survey of these complaint psalms, I have tried to indicate why I described the psalms as traditional, even though each poem works with the tradition in its own way. There are other issues that complicate reading these texts. The imagery is illusive and appeals to imagination, so that any attempt to identify the enemies is bound to fail. There are also shifts from singular to plural and from personal to national enemies. In sum, actual situations of "real" persons who sufferer from hostility do not emerge clearly. The figurative language of these poems is general and inclusive and can cover many particular instances. One might say that the strategy of this poetry seeks to include many specific cases of hostility from enemies in the larger, complex, and manifold vision presented by the traditional language.

The Stories

We turn now to the stories. The events or situations in David's life referred to in the titles of the psalms appear to refer to stories known to us from the books of Samuel, although the identifications are not always certain. As with the poems, I consider the stories traditional. The poems reflect their traditionality mainly through repeated and varied phraseology. The stories show this traditionality more in repeated patterns at

the level of episodes, scenes or even whole stories. In an earlier study on narrative, I discussed various movements in the action of biblical stories, such as "difficulty/rescue," as well as its variation, "difficulty/escape" and "wrong done/punishment." While I did not at that time associate these patterns directly with traditional patterns, I would be inclined now to think that many are reflections of traditional patterns. In any event, I approach the stories to be discussed in terms of such patterns. As I noted earlier, I am not trying to surmise what may have led the person who added the title to connect the story and the psalm. I am simply exploring what happens when this kind of psalm and this kind of story have been linked.

The title of Ps 142 says simply that David was "in a cave" while Ps 57 mentions that David was in a cave because he was fleeing from Saul. There are two narratives that place David in a cave while he is on the run from Saul. First Samuel 22:1 relates that David escaped to the cave of Adullam to hide from Saul, who does not subsequently appear. In 1 Sam 24:1 (Eng. 23:29), David ends up in the area of En-gedi, where he enters a cave with his supporters. As he is searching for David, Saul enters this very cave in order to relieve himself. Curiously, while Saul remains a general threat, neither of these stories is concerned primarily about an immanent danger from which David needs to be rescued. In the first story, the cave is simply a place where supporters have joined him. In the second story, David is presented with a chance to kill Saul but declines to do so. After Saul leaves, David calls out to him to tell him that he has been spared certain death. Incidentally, this story has a parallel in 1 Sam 26, where David refrains from killing Saul as he sleeps in his camp. David later announces to Saul how he has been spared. The repetition of this story pattern probably reflects the traditional nature of these stories.

Psalm 56 bears a title that refers to a time when David was seized by the Philistines at Gath. In 1 Sam 21:11–16 (Eng. 10–15), in fleeing from Saul, David goes to Achish, king of Gath, where he is taken to be a hero and the king of the land. Apparently fearing for his life, David feigns madness so that he is dismissed by Achish, thus escaping from danger. This incident also is referred to in the title of Ps 34. Here at least David appears to be in real danger, although not from Saul. He manages his own escape, rescues himself, so to speak, by employing a ruse.

The title of Ps 54 suggests a time when the Ziphites came and reported to Saul that David was hiding with them. There are two references to the Ziphites coming to Saul about David, one in 1 Sam 23 and one in ch. 26. In 1 Sam 23:19–28 the Ziphites go to Saul at Gibea and report that David is hiding in their territory. They propose that, when Saul comes, they will

surrender David to him. Saul follows the Ziphites to their land and begins to search for David. David hurries to escape him, but just as Saul and his men are closing in, Saul receives a message that the Philistines have made a raid and so he breaks off his pursuit of David to deal with them. This episode presents David in a perilous situation. He is on the verge of being killed by Saul, but escapes because of an unexpected event. The second appearance of Ziphites is in 1 Sam 26:1, and the wording is very similar to 1 Sam 23:19. Saul goes down to the territory of the Ziphites to the place where they said David would be hiding, creating a dangerous situation for David.

While David appears to be in need of rescue, the story takes the same kind of turn as did 1 Sam 24, where Saul enters a cave to relieve himself and unwittingly falls into David's hands who does not try to kill him. Here in 1 Sam 26, David enters Saul's camp at night and finds himself in a position to kill Saul, but declines to take action, and, from a safe distance, David announces to Saul that he spared the king's life. The story is not so much about David being in need of rescue from his enemies as about his refusing to take advantage of an opportunity to kill his main enemy and thus rescue himself from the continuing danger of Saul, a story that presents David in a positive light.

The last psalm title to be considered comes from Ps 59, which states that Saul sent persons to watch David's house in order to kill him. This probably refers to the narrative in 1 Sam 19:8–17. The story opens with a brief comment explaining how David attacked the Philistines, won a great victory, and put them to flight. After this, a malevolent spirit provoked Saul so that he tried to pin David to the wall with his spear while he was playing his harp. When he missed, David, as might be expected, fled. The danger for David continues and intensifies when Saul sends emissaries to kill David the next day. In this difficult situation, it is not Yahweh who intervenes to rescue David, nor does David himself take the initiative to escape but it is his wife (Saul's daughter) who reacts to the situation. It is she who warns him to leave that very night and lets him down through the window. She also prepares his bed to make it appear that he is in it and, and it is she who lies to the messengers, telling them that he is sick. When Saul challenges her and rebukes her after the deception, she lies, saying that David threatened to kill her, if she did not help him.

The stories discussed above are similar in many ways, yet present interesting variations. All begin with a situation that is dangerous for David, although not all the stories go on to deal with this danger. Three stories

do, but there is no overt intervention of the deity. First, when David finds himself among the Philistines (1 Sam 21), he must use a deception to escape. Second, when Saul instructs spies to keep watch on David's house (1 Sam 19), Michal takes over and arranges his escape using a deception. The third instance is less clear. Following a tip-off from the Ziphites, Saul is close to catching David (1 Sam 23); in the end, however, he must leave to deal with a raid by the Philistines. It is this distraction that saved David from being caught. Two somewhat similar stories begin with a situation of danger but do not move on to an account of rescue, resolving the story in another way. In 1 Sam 24, David refuses to kill Saul in the cave, and in 1 Sam 26 he refuses to kill Saul in his camp. The similarity of these stories could support the notion that they reflect traditional style. Danger followed by a rescue or escape is an action pattern that is fairly common in biblical narrative and shows up in some form in three of the stories. These two stories, then, start out as rescue stories but finish with similar episodes about David refusing to kill Saul.

Conclusions

After this brief review of the poems and the stories, we may now return to the issue raised at the beginning—namely, the titles that connect David to certain psalms. It was suggested that this phenomenon could be seen as something more than simply one psalm related to one story. Rather, a psalm, related to a set of similar, traditional poems, and a story, related to a similar set of traditional stories, were brought together by the titles. Because of the common, traditional language, the set of poems and the set of stories represent two different ways of talking about the problem of a person in danger or difficulty and in need of rescue or escape. I am not, of course, suggesting that the persons who provided the titles for the psalm had thought along these lines, so that this would explain why they made these connections between the psalms and the stories. Nevertheless, the fact that these connections were made permits us as readers to reflect on how these connections open up opportunities for exploration.

As I have already noted, the poems are expressed in traditional, figurative language and provide few specific details. That is to say, the reference is to the tradition rather than a specific situation. As I noted above, one might say that the shared language and imagery of the complaints provide a way of talking about the experience of danger and rescue. In a sense, all individual cases, including that of David, seem to be lifted up into a general but complex vision or picture presented by the complaints

as a group. It is a vision of a person in difficulty set in a prayer for help governed by a movement from danger to rescue, although precisely how divine intervention is expected to take place, or viewed as already having taken place is not clear. Listeners or readers may understand their own particular situations within the larger picture.

While psalms use the language of persuasion and project a view of danger and rescue from the position of danger, the stories describe a movement from danger to rescue, identifying specific characters and places. The enemies and their actions are depicted and the situations of danger are clearly explained. Still, the stories seem to follow traditional plots. David always succeeds despite all the odds, and so appears to be larger than life. Although both poems and stories appeal to the imagination, the stories and poems work differently. The stories reveal more variation and a wider range of possibilities is left open. As narratives they lead readers, or listeners, through a trajectory, from a beginning to an end, usually from a danger to a rescue or escape. Direct intervention by the deity is not contemplated, while escape contrived by David or some one near him is. In addition, two of the stories depict David declining to kill Saul, an action that would have provided an escape from the danger of Saul.

While both the larger groupings of psalms and stories into which the traditional language leads present variegated pictures of rescue, pictures which do not resolve into a harmonious view, they present a rather rich network of possibilities that explore the theme of danger and rescue.

Penitent to a Fault: The Characterization of David in Psalm 51

R. Christopher Heard

All readers of the biblical psalms know that David figures prominently in the Psalter. Sometimes psalm texts themselves name him explicitly (as in Ps 89's invocation of God's covenant with David). Most often, however, David hovers around and behind psalm texts, attached to the psalms by their superscriptions—both the frequent but unrevealing *lᵉdawid* ("to/of/for David") notation and the more interesting narrative superscriptions that connect their psalms to the story of David's life. The superscription to Ps 51 pins that psalm to the time "when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba." The superscription thus invites readers to perceive Ps 51 as David's prayer of penitence after Nathan confronted him for his crimes against Bathsheba and Uriah. But what sort of David is it who meets readers in Ps 51?

King David and the Psalms

Raising such a question necessarily implies that there is some value in accepting the superscription's hermeneutical invitation—an implication that not all Psalms scholars have been willing to accept. Most would agree with Westermann that the superscriptions belong to a relatively late stage in the Psalter's compilation and editing.[1] The differences between the superscriptions in the traditional Hebrew (MT) and Greek (LXX) versions of the Psalter support this notion.[2] Therefore, very few modern exegetes have granted these superscriptions any value for identifying the true compositional context of the psalms they introduce.

1. Claus Westermann, *The Living Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 19.
2. Nancy deClaissé-Walford, *Introduction to the Psalms* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2004), 33; S. E. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 245.

Michael Goulder departs from this trend in tying the "prayers of David" quite closely to David himself. Goulder does not cling quite so tightly to Davidic authorship as do Kirkpatrick, Leupold, or Longman, but he does argue that an anonymous member of David's royal retinue wrote Ps 51 and the other "prayers of David." Goulder thinks that the historical notes themselves are "late guesses" that mostly turn out to be incorrect, *except* for Pss 51 and 72.[3] Yet Goulder's arguments rest on a shaky historical foundation, namely, the presumption that there was a historical David very much like the biblical David, a king served by a robust administrative infrastructure.[4] It would be hard for a careful historian to follow Goulder closely, given the dearth of evidence in favor of his core presuppositions.

Historical reconstruction of David's life and writing activity is not, however, the only reasonable way to relate the figure of King David to the book of Psalms by way of the psalm headings. Even if one judges the psalm headings to be historically unreliable, someone—either the psalm's actual author or a later tradent—sensed a connection between Ps 51 and the life of King David as he or she knew it. A number of commentators therefore suggest either that the psalm was originally written by someone other and later than David, but with the David-and-Bathsheba story in mind,[5] or that an older *lᵉdawid* psalm heading was expanded in quasi-midrashic fashion to include a reference to the David-and-Bathsheba story.[6] However the narrative headings originated, they suggest that a

3. Michael D. Goulder, *The Prayers of David (Psalms 51–72): Studies in the Psalter, II* (JSOTSup 102; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990), 24. Compare A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902); H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969); and Tremper Longman, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1988).

4. To explore this question further, start with Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *David and Solomon: In Search of the Bible's Sacred Kings and the Roots of the Western Tradition* (New York: Free Press, 2006).

5. A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 1:390; Samuel Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 403.

6. For the general principle, see Brevard S. Childs, "Psalm Titles and Midrashic Exegesis," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 16 (1971): 137–50; James Luther Mays, "The David of the Psalms," *Interpretation* 40 (1986): 143–55 (151); Elieser Slomovic, "Toward an Understanding of the Formation of Historical Titles in the Book of Psalms," *ZAW* 91 (1979): 350–80. For Ps 51 specifically, see Edward R. Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-one: In the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Patternism* (Leiden: Brill, 1962), 231; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (FOTL 14; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 212; Hans-Joachim Kraus,

"biographical" reading of these psalms should prove to be *hermeneutically* fruitful even if *historically* barren.[7]

In this essay offered in honor of David Gunn, who has often engaged literary-aesthetic approaches to reading biblical narrative, it would be amiss not to also invoke post-structuralist, reader-oriented notions of intertextuality as another possible justification for reading Ps 51 in light of the story in 2 Sam 11–12. The arbitrary pairing of texts for intertextual interpretation can be defended using (among other things) Italo Calvino's image of the mental bookshelf:

> A book is written so that it can be put beside other books and take its place on a hypothetical bookshelf. Once it is there, in some way or other it alters the shelf, expelling certain other volumes from their places or forcing them back into the second row, while demanding that certain others should be brought up to the front.[8]

From the perspective of a reader-oriented approach to intertextuality, reading any two texts in light of each other, just to see what emerges, needs no more justification than readerly curiosity.[9] In this particular case, of course, there is more than just sheer readerly will involved. At least one other reader made that connection long ago, and encoded it in the psalm's superscription, thereby eternally inviting all subsequent readers to pair Ps 51 and 2 Sam 11–12. This essay accepts the heading's centuries-old invitation, and reads Ps 51 as a prayer of David subsequent to his confrontation by Nathan.

Literary and Historical Davids

Acceptance of the superscription's invitation is a *hermeneutical* decision, not a *historical* one. This essay will not engage the myriad questions that surround the historical value of the narratives in the Former Prophets or of the biographical psalm headings. Historical study is important and

Psalms 1–59: A Commentary (Continental Commentary; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 64; Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, 94; and many other commentators.

7. Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 102; Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 501; Mays, "The David of the Psalms," 143; Rolf Rendtorff, "The Psalms of David: David in the Psalms," in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception* (ed. P. W. Flint et al.; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 53–64 (54).

8. Italo Calvino, *The Uses of Literature: Essays* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986), 81.

9. R. Christopher Heard, "The *Dao* of Qoheleth: An Intertextual Reading of the *Daode Jing* and the Book of Ecclesiastes," *Jian Dao* 5 (1996): 65–93.

even compelling, but even an absolute disproof of David's existence—let alone his having taken the actions ascribed to him in biblical narrative or having composed any poetry—would not derail the present inquiry. Whatever else the biblical narratives might be, they are clearly *stories*,[10] and it is as such that they will be treated in this essay. Working from "a view of the critic as one whose most important task is to discriminate between, and mediate, aesthetic and moral values,"[11] this essay explores the interpretive effect of reading Ps 51 against the background suggested in the superscription.

It is important, though, to consider what story the author of the psalm's superscription might have known about King David, Uriah, Bathsheba, and Nathan. Even if a historical reconstruction is not the goal, at least a rough tracing of the story world and its presuppositions remains necessary.[12] To readers of the canonical text, 2 Sam 11–12 immediately springs to mind, and there is some evidence that this might have been the case for the psalm's author as well (or at least that the psalm's author knew a version of the story very similar to the one now embedded in 2 Samuel).[13] Dalglish and Goulder both point to a number of close verbal parallels between Ps 51 and 2 Sam 11–12 that support this suggestion.[14]

In this light, it seems quite appropriate to treat the story world of 2 Sam 11–12 as the narrative context for Ps 51. That world is not limited, of course, to two chapters, but is embedded in the overarching storyline of the Torah and Former Prophets, as evidenced by Joab's invocation of a narrative that readers know from the book of Judges (2 Sam 11:21). In what follows, therefore, I will unabashedly—and without constant qualification—treat the story world of Genesis through 2 Kings as the broad narrative backdrop for Ps 51, with special emphasis of course given to 2 Sam 11–12. Moreover, I will call the psalmist "David," as the superscription recommends, trusting that readers will understand these references as *literary* rather than *historical.*

10. For a substantial discussion, see David M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (JSOTSup 6; Sheffield: JSOT, 1978), esp. Chapter 3.

11. David M. Gunn, *The Fate of King Saul: An Interpretation of a Biblical Story* (JSOTSup 14; Sheffield: JSOT, 1984), 12.

12. David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 11.

13. See, for instance, the discussions of the "Succession Narrative" by Randall C. Bailey, *David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10–12* (JSOTSup 75; Sheffield: JSOT 1990); Goulder, *The Prayers of David*, 31; and Gunn, *The Story of King David*, 19.

14. Dalglish, *Psalm 51*, 211; Goulder, *The Prayers of David*, 59.

Confession

David opens Ps 51 with a plea for mercy predicated on divine love. Within the narrative context—David having recently been rebuked by the prophet Nathan for his taking of Bathsheba and his subsequent murder-by-proxy of her husband Uriah—the initial request for "washing" and "cleansing" sounds fairly generic, if reasonably well-suited to that context. Then comes the jarring statement in v. 6 (in Hebrew; v. 4 in English versions), "against you [God], you alone, have I sinned," a statement bearing significant resemblance to David's terse statement in 2 Sam 12:13, "I have sinned against the Lord."

How could David possibly say that he has sinned against God *and God alone*, in light of the adultery and murder—two irreducibly *social* crimes—that triggered Nathan's confrontation? Scholarly reactions to this dissonance between psalm text and narrative context have run in basically two directions (which are not mutually exclusive). Some interpreters use this phrase as further evidence against the historical reliability of the psalm's superscription and go about interpreting the psalm without reference to David, a course I will not pursue for reasons specified above.[15] Leupold's suggestion that "all the nation knew of these crimes… The obvious was just not dragged out into the open. It was too sordid for mentioning," does not do justice to David's qualifier, "you alone," which clearly denies or dismisses any offense against other people.[16]

Other interpreters do not see any problem with this verse. Indeed, some laud the statement as a profound theological insight. For example, Walter Brueggemann writes:

> It could be that a connection to the David–Uriah–Bathsheba incident has a heuristic value, whether it is historically correct or not. For the sin of that episode is not finally sexual violation (against Bathsheba) or murder (against Uriah), but it is the sin of pride against Yahweh, of imagining that one is autonomous and can live one's life without reference to Yahweh and Yahweh's commandments.[17]

Brueggemann's comment is typical of this line of reasoning.[18] But these perceptions of theological insight are consistent with neither the larger

15. So W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Psalms: Translated with Text-critical and Exegetical Note* (London: SPCK, 1939), 271.

16. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 399.

17. Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 102.

18. For other examples, see Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, 1:394; John H. Eaton, *The Psalms: A Historical and Spiritual Commentary with an Introduction and New Translation* (London: Continuum, 2005), 206; Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-one*; Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, 289; Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, 502; Leupold, *Exposition of the*

biblical vocabulary of "sin" nor the narrative intertext in 2 Sam 11–12. Albert Keller's notion that "only before God do harmful actions become sin"[19] sounds theologically lofty, but it flies in the face of the actual biblical use of the verb *chata'* ("to sin"). Biblical texts and characters speak quite freely of "sinning" against other human beings, with no hint that these statements are theologically deficient.[20] Moreover, Nathan's parable in 2 Sam 12:1–4 focuses entirely on interpersonal "sins" (not using this word), as does David's fiery reply in 2 Sam 12:5–6. Nathan's speech in 2 Sam 12:7–12 does invoke the notion of "despising the (word of the) Lord" as a dimension of David's guilt, but by no means does this displace Uriah and his wife (whom Nathan does not call by name) from view, for David's sins against Bathsheba and Uriah actually constitute despising the (word of the) Lord.

Yet while Nathan draws attention to all three offended parties, David—in both 2 Sam 12:13 and Ps 51:6 (4)—will acknowledge only one, his deity. The effect of this move is to efface the human victims of David's sin, and thereby to eliminate their claims from any calculus of justice in this matter. David's "confessions" restrict the frame of reference to just two parties, the sinner himself and an offended deity with a reputation for mercy and steadfast love. There need be no victim impact statements here (though Rosenblit tries to rectify this[21]) as the divine court weighs up the defendant's pleas for leniency—and Bathsheba and Uriah are swept under the rug with a theological flourish that has also taken in commentators through the centuries.[22]

The obscuring of Bathsheba and Uriah continues as the psalmist widens the horizon of confession from the specific offenses at hand—David's sins against Bathsheba and Uriah—to his sinfulness in general. The extravagant language, "I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me," impresses many commentators with its theological profundity, and has engendered many debates on such topics as "original

Psalms, 399; Oesterley, *The Psalms*, 274; Terrien, *The Psalms*, 404; Artur Weiser, *The Psalms* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), 403.

19. Albert H. Keller, "Who Is the 'I' In Psalm 51?," in *Persons in Community: Theological Voices from the Pastorate* (ed. W. H. Lazareth; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 29.

20. See, e.g., Gen 20:9; 42:2; Exod 5:16; 1 Sam 2:25; and 1 Kgs 8:31, to cite but five of numerous possible examples; cf. Goulder, *The Prayers of David*, 59; and Marti J. Steussy, *Psalms* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2004), 129.

21. Barbara Ellison Rosenblit, "David, Bat Sheva, and the Fifty-First Psalm," *Cross Currents* 45 (1995): 326–40.

22. Besides the recent interpreters mentioned in the previous paragraph, see also Rosenblit's examination of rabbinical treatments.

sin."[23] In other words, commentators have for a long time taken the bait and allowed a "confession" of sinfulness in general to distract them from the specific sins that should have been firmly at the center of attention.

Penitence

The only hint at David's actual crimes in the psalm proper appears—if it appears at all—in v. 16 (14) in the plea, "Deliver me from *damim* [literally 'bloods']." This statement admits of at least two chief interpretations.[24] On the one hand, *damim* could refer to the "bloodguiltiness" conferred by having murdered Uriah. Goulder defends this view with reference to Shimei's characterization of David as an *ʾish haddamim*, "a man of blood" or "murderer," as well as a few other passages.[25] On the other hand, a number of interpreters think *damim* refers to the psalmist's *own* violent death.[26] Readers evaluating this option should keep in mind that commentators who prefer to read *damim* as the psalmist's own death are often looking for a way to make sense of *damim* without reference to the narrative context assigned by the superscription. However, this interpretation does not require readers to reject the superscription's contextualization, since they could think here of the violent death associated with blood vengeance or state-sponsored capital punishment.

As Goulder writes, this interpretation brings readers full circle, for such a consequence would arise only from a heinous crime like murder, and thus a fear of blood vengeance or capital punishment could—indeed, must—be read as a tacit admission of guilt for such a crime. But where does David's emphasis lie, and to what rhetorical end? The preceding lines focus on the benefits David hopes to receive from God—"let me hear joy and gladness," "restore to me the joy of your salvation"—and the privations David does not wish to suffer—"do not cast me away," "do not take your holy spirit from me." Thus, the immediate context suggests that David's "deliver me from *damim*" is more likely to have been intended to mean "prevent my execution" than "forgive my guilt," even if these two senses cannot be cleanly separated.

23. See, e.g., Goulder, *The Prayers of David*, 53; and Frank Lothar Hossfield and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2* (trans. L. M. Maloney; Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 25; as well as almost any of the standard commentaries.

24. Leaving aside the creative emendations that some commentators have proposed; see Goulder, *The Prayers of David*, 54, for a brief review of these.

25. Goulder, *The Prayers of David*, 53; cf. Dalglish, *Psalm Fifty-one*, 175; and Eaton, *The Psalms*, 207.

26. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, 1:400; Westermann, *The Living Psalms*, 99; Hossfield and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 13.

David's penitence thus stops short of accepting the default punishment for his crimes. What penance, then, *is* he willing to accept? In v. 9 (7), David proposes that he be "purged" with hyssop and washed, presumably with water. It is not altogether clear just what David thinks should be done with the hyssop. Based on the parallel with "wash me" in the second line of the couplet, most commentators imagine a branch of hyssop being used as the delivery system for blood or water in some sort of sprinkling ritual.[27] Goulder, however, argues that sprinkling is too mild for a purgative ritual, and that instead the hyssop will have been the chief ingredient in a potion drunk by the penitent king.[28]

Should readers object that a hyssop enema really is not that much closer to execution than a sprinkling rite, Goulder maintains that the psalmist's reference to "crushed bones" (v. 8 [6]) reflects a flogging. Most other commentators have disagreed, but then again, most other commentators disregard the context suggested by the superscription, so they try to explain the "crushed bones" as symptoms of an illness. But even if Goulder's argument holds, and David accepts *corporal* punishment, flogging and purgation still stop well short of *capital* punishment. Since when does a convicted defendant get to determine his own sentence? As Goulder writes,

> All of this, however, only serves to reinforce our problem. The psalmist is guilty of murder, and he has been sentenced, not to death, but a beating and a purgative; and he is pleading disingenuously that his fault is against God alone, and that God should not be blamed (!, *tisdaq*, *tizkeh*, v. 4) for the lenient punishment. How then can he get away with it? The answer must surely be: because he is the king. Only the king would have the position and influence to be above the law in this way; and we have an instance of the king's so being in that David was not executed for the murder of Uriah.[29]

To put it bluntly: King David, who abused his royal power in having Bathsheba brought to him for his sexual satisfaction, and then reacted to Bathsheba's unforeseen pregnancy by abusing his royal power in engineering Uriah's death, again abuses his royal power by "submitting" to a lesser punishment than the narrative world would find appropriate for his crime.

One might think that an adulterer and murderer whose death sentence has been reduced to a flogging and purgation might at least be expected to offer a sin offering (Lev 4:22–26 would certainly plant this suggestion

27. Eaton, *The Psalms*, 179; Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, 291.
28. Goulder, *The Prayers of David*, 56.
29. Ibid., 59.

in knowledgeable readers' minds), but King David will have none of that. In vv. 18–19 (16–17), David denies the efficacy of animal sacrifices, substituting sorrow and contrition instead. Were David in line for the punishment awaiting any common murderer, he might be right; the Torah does not allow a sacrifice or ransom to be substituted for a murderer's execution.[30] David's downgraded punishment, however, might raise the question of how to deal with the ongoing threat of defilement to the land, ordinarily thought to be countered by the death of the offender (according to Num 35:33). David's denial of sacrificial efficacy, therefore, might arise in response to someone with a priestly or Levitical mindset who has, offstage, suggested such a sacrifice as a kind of "fallback measure" for ensuring the land's cleanliness.

This line of reasoning is by no means flawless, but following it through suggests a darkly ironic parallel with the psalm's narrative setting. In 2 Sam 12, Nathan's parable rhetorically entrapped David because David aligned himself with the poor man whose rich neighbor, loath to feed a guest with a sheep from his own flock, stole the poor man's only ewe lamb. Nathan's parable was, of course, allegorical (if imperfectly so). At the end of Ps 51, David proves himself once again to be "that man," loath to sacrifice an animal (presumably a bull; see v. 21 [19]) from among his own livestock. Readers might think this a "victimless crime" until they realize that, within the story world of the Torah and Former Prophets, the Levites, widows, orphans, and other disadvantaged folk must often depend on sacrifices and tithes for their meals (cf. Deut 14:22–29, which, however, treats tithes rather than sacrifices). Admittedly, David speaks very generically of "sacrifices" (*zebach*) and specifically of a "whole burnt offering" (*ʿolah*), whereas one might rather expect a "sin offering" (*chattat*); this could indicate that the current speculations are simply unfruitful, or it could be another verbal ploy, directing attention away from the most relevant matter. If the latter, then once again, the man with much has deprived those who have little—and has cloaked it in such pleasing rhetoric that generations of commentators (including Eaton and, somewhat surprisingly, Goulder) have been so impressed by the poet's "exalted theology" that they fail to hear the subtle echo of Nathan's parable.[31]

30. See especially Exod 21:12–14; Lev 24:17–21; Num 35:30–34; and, among commentators, Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, 401; Eaton, *The Psalms*, 207; Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (WBC 20; Dallas: Word, 1990), 28.

31. John H. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms* (2d ed.; Sheffield: JSOT, 1986), 72; Goulder, *The Prayers of David*, 66.

At least one ancient reader, though, seems not to have wanted David to get away with this denial of sacrifice. Almost all commentators, even those who defend actual, historical Davidic authorship of Ps 51, assign the last two verses to an exilic or early post-exilic context, thanks to their reference to Jerusalem's damaged walls (as v. 20 [18] is usually interpreted.).[32] Most interpreters who favor any pre-exilic date for the psalm consider these two verses a later addition, as do some who date the main psalm to post-exilic times, and the last two verses still later. Others take the verses as integral to the psalm, and therefore an argument against Davidic authorship.[33]

If one cannot help but hear a different, non-Davidic voice in the final two verses, that voice is decidedly critical of the dominant speaker in Ps 51. The "walls of Jerusalem" are most naturally interpreted as the city's external defensive walls (on which, see more below), but perhaps the greater threat comes from inside the city. Perhaps what Zion really needs are walls to shield attractive women from the king's lustful gaze; when the king stops preying on his own people, *right* sacrifices can recommence, offered not by the ostensibly penitent king but by the newly reassured people (note that, unlike the overwhelmingly *singular* tone of the psalm, v. 21 [19] uses a *plural* verb: "*they* will offer bulls on your altar"). More chillingly, this reference to Jerusalem's walls might spark a memory of Rabbah's walls—the place of Uriah's death, according to the messenger that Joab sent to David in 2 Sam 11—which in turn might spark a memory of how justice finally came to the murderous Abimelech (note that Joab himself makes this connection in 2 Sam 11). Might the "wall of Jerusalem" in v. 20 (18) be a subtle, lightly coded suggestion that what Jerusalem really needs is capital punishment for murderers, even royal ones?

In the other hand, following the superscription's lead and hearing David's voice in Ps 51:20–21 (18–19) leads readers to yet another misdirection. David shifts the focus from a matter internal to Jerusalem—his abuse of royal power against Bathsheba and Uriah—to matters of external defense. The David-and-Bathsheba narrative is, after all, wrapped in the cloak of the Ammonite war, involving siege warfare against Rabbah. How easy it would be to argue that Jerusalem must shore up its defenses,

32. But see Goulder, *The Prayers of David*, 63.

33. Charles A. Briggs and Emilie G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. &. T. Clark, 1906), 1:lxiv; M. J. Dahood, *Psalms II: 51–100* (AB 17; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), 2, 9; Steussy, *Psalms*, 129.

must prepare for a possible counterstrike from remaining Ammonite battalions or a sympathetic third party, and that religious propriety must take a back seat to national security. Perhaps there are no military overtones, but simply public works projects to be completed.[34] In any event, David (as the speaker of Ps 51:20–21) asserts that sacrifices are a topic more appropriate for another day.

The Characterization of David in Psalm 51

What sort of David, then, meets readers in Ps 51? Writing generally about the characterization of David in the psalms, Rendtorff says of those psalms bearing biographical superscriptions,

> David is presented as suffering and lamenting—but at the same time as hoping and trusting in God's help… David is presented as an example and a figure with whom the individual reader as well as the praying congregation can identify in times of need and distress. In particular, David stands as an example because almost every lamentation psalm related to David's name ends with an expression of hope and confidence in God's help. David is not only the exemplary sufferer, but also the exemplary believer.[35]

In the view of Hossfield and Zenger, the originally non-Davidic Ps 51 was "Davidized" because,

> the tradents saw a figure of identification par excellence: the David who neither excuses nor conceals his sin, but confesses and repents of it before God, is forgiven by God, and thus establishes hope for every Israelite who abandons the way of sin and returns to God.[36]

Yet if one really takes seriously the narrative context suggested by the superscription, one does not actually find a David who approaches penitence with "unflinching candour"[37] or "searching self-analysis".[38] Instead, one finds a David who approaches confession as damage control and penitence as public relations. Instead of candidly admitting his specific sins against Bathsheba and Uriah and accepting the expected punishment—execution—the David of Ps 51 engages in misdirection. He obscures the social or "horizontal" dimensions of his crimes by

34. Goulder, *The Prayers of David*, 67.
35. Rendtorff, "The Psalms of David," 63.
36. Hossfield and Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 23.
37. Weiser, *The Psalms*, 401.
38. M. Buttenweiser, *The Psalms* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), 188.

emphasizing his "vertical" or theological relationship with God. He hides his recent, particular sin within a hazy, generic confession of lifelong sinfulness. He lessens his own punishment and cloaks his reprieve in affirmations of divine mercy. He even, in a sense, repeats his parabolic crime by withholding sacrifices that might be deemed appropriate.

This essay is offered as a gift to honor David Gunn, but it runs the risk of being received instead as an act of theft, namely, the theft of the image of King David as the exemplary penitent, or even the theft of Ps 51 as an exemplary prayer of penitence. This "suspicious" or even "cynical" interpretation arises, however, from taking the superscription seriously as indicating the narrative context in which the psalm should be read—and from taking seriously David's crimes against Bathsheba and Uriah. Perhaps, then, even if this essay has taken something away from popular images of King David, it will have given something back—if only new eyes to see—to those victims who otherwise would remain nameless and faceless in the bright lights of obscurantist "penitence."

PSALM 23 AND METHOD: READING A DAVID PSALM*

David J. A. Clines

Psalm 23 is the quintessential Davidic psalm. It is the psalm that most people first think of when their mind wanders to David the sweet psalmist of Israel (2 Sam 23:1). In it, David the shepherd of sheep imagines himself for a moment the sheep of a shepherd. Or, shall we say, an Israelite poet imagines himself as a shepherd imagining himself as a sheep. It is an intriguing travesty when a shepherd dresses himself as a sheep, one worthy of unpicking with all the hermeneutical implements we can lay our hands on.[1]

So this paper is a sampler of methods for reading, of rhetorical criticism, deconstruction, gender criticism, materialist criticism, postcolonial criticism, and psychoanalytic criticism. Such a blending of methods of reading and interpretation is almost becoming a characteristic of biblical criticism today; rather than the use of a single methodology for interpretation, or even of one methodology by one person and another by another person, we are increasingly encountering an interweaving of approaches, a confluence of the methods.

Before I begin my reading(s) of the psalm I will present my own translation of the psalm, together with a few notes justifying the additions I have felt it necessary to make to the translation for the sake of clarity:[2]

* I have great pleasure in offering this paper to my long-time friend and colleague, David Gunn, whose many contributions on the art of reading biblical texts have been a model of independent and innovative scholarship

1. This paper was first read under the title "The Confluence of Hermeneutical Methodologies for the Book of Psalms (Psalm 23 in Particular)" (paper presented at the International Colloquium on Hermeneutics and the Reading of the Bible at Chung Yuan Christian University, Taiwan, April 22–24, 2007).

2. What follows is a revision of versions of the psalm I have previously presented in my papers: "The Lord is my Shepherd in East and South East Asia," *Journal of Sino-Christian Studies* 1 (2006): 37–54; and "Translating Psalm 23," in *Reflection and Refraction: Studies in Biblical Historiography in Honour of A. Graeme Auld* (ed. Robert Rezetko, Timothy H. Lim and W. Brian Aucker; VTSup

A David Psalm

Yahweh is a shepherd to me;
  therefore[3] there is nothing I lack.
In grassy pastures he lets me lie, chewing the cud;[4]
  down to quiet waters he leads me;
he revives my life;
  he leads me by the right paths—
  all[5] to uphold his repute.
Even when I walk through a dark valley,
  I fear no harm, for you are with me;
  your crook and your staff are my reassurance.
You spread a banquet before me even if[6] enemies surround me;
  you anoint my head with oil;
  abundance is my lot.
Such[7] goodness and constancy shall surely be my companions[8]

113; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 67–80. For justification of the translation in detail, the reader is referred to those papers.

3. There is nothing in the Hebrew corresponding to "therefore," but I have added it to explain the relation between the first and second cola (as I understand it). It is not that there are two truths—(1) Yahweh is my shepherd, (2) there is nothing I lack—but rather that it is *because* of the first statement that the second is the case.

4. There is nothing equivalent to "chewing the cud" in the Hebrew; but I needed to make clear that the sheep's lying down is not for rest (as some think) but for digesting its food (and so this first colon about eating becomes more evidently parallel to the second colon which is about drinking). Sheep remain standing while they are eating, but they lie down to chew the cud, that is, ruminate on their food, which they will happily do for several hours a day.

5. I have added "all" in order to make clear that there are four things mentioned that the shepherd does for the sake of his reputation: lets me lie, leads me to water (v. 2), revives my life, leads by right paths (v. 3a, b). It is not only leading the sheep by the right paths that he does for the sake of his reputation.

6. The phrase "before my enemies" is a difficulty. It seems unlikely to mean that Yahweh provides an excellent meal for the sheep only when surrounded by enemies. I assume rather that at every mealtime the shepherd is spreading a banquet for the sheep, and that here he is said to do so even in the least promising circumstances, that is, when enemies are present.

7. From where do these abstracts "goodness" and "constancy" suddenly spring? This poem has hitherto been almost exclusively about concrete particulars. I infer that *everything* that the shepherd does for the sheep in vv. 2–5 is here conceived of and summarized as acts of "goodness" and "constancy," and the sheep means that it is confident that its experience of the shepherd hitherto will continue into the future. Hence I add "such," as a recognition that the assurance of future "goodness" and "constancy" is not a new idea that has just occurred to the sheep but rather puts into general terms what the sheep has already been enjoying.

as long as I live,
and I shall journey again[9] to Yahweh's house for many days to come.

1. *Rhetorical Criticism*

I will consider here only one rhetorical element of the poem, namely its imagery, which is surely the first and major question in a rhetorical criticism of the psalm. No one doubts that the "speaking voice" as the psalm opens is that of a sheep. That means of course that the (human) person who speaks is representing himself or herself as a sheep; the sheep is a metaphor for the person who represents himself or herself in that way. The metaphor of the sheep is continued in the grazing in grassy pastures in v. 2, in the sheep's being led by the shepherd in right paths in v. 3, and in the sheep's walking through a dark valley and being reassured by the sight of the shepherd's weapons in v. 4. The question raises itself, however, whether this image is sustained to the very end of the poem.

It has seemed strange to many readers of the psalm that a sheep should have a "banquet" spread before it, that its head should be anointed with oil (v. 5), and that it should be journeying to the house of Yahweh (v. 6). For this reason, many scholars think that the metaphor of the sheep changes at the end of v. 4 to that of the guest, who might more naturally be anointed with oil by the host and have a banquet spread for him or her.

I have some problems with this view, nevertheless. First, there is no indication in the psalm of a change of person or of metaphor. It must still be the sheep in v. 4c, for the crook and staff are the implements of a shepherd; but where is the sign that in v. 5 a completely different metaphor has taken over? If Yahweh is said so unequivocally to be a shepherd

8. The term here usually means "pursue, chase," even "persecute" (BDB, p. 922b). "Pursue" would be unintelligible here (though that is the translation of JB and NAB, for example). Since the verb is plainly used in a positive sense, the meaning here must be "follow"; but even so the cultural frame of "following" is not easily transposed into the modern world. The social reality is that of the world of ancient hospitality, in which the traveller (and the sheep is a traveller) is accompanied on the road by the host, or servants of the host, for protection and entertainment. Moffatt alone of the English versions I have surveyed seizes the point, with his plain but bold translation "Goodness and Kindness wait on me."

9. I am translating the Masoretic text, which unmistakably means "I shall return," rather than adopting an emendation to "I shall dwell," as all our English versions do.

in v. 1, why should we suppose that he becomes something else before the end of this quite short poem without that being signalled? Why does the first verse not read, "Yahweh is a shepherd to me—except when he is not a shepherd but a host"? Secondly, the third-person descriptions of Yahweh that open and close the psalm are interrupted in vv. 4–5 by a second-person address to Yahweh; it would be strange if the transition from sheep to guest occurred in the middle of that address. Thirdly, while it is possible to imagine a sheep being fed while surrounded by enemies, it is harder to imagine the circumstances under which a host would offer a banquet to a guest when enemies were looking on. A sheep must eat where there is grass, even if predators are in the neighbourhood; a host has only to close the front door to keep enemies out of the dinner party. Fourthly, it is odd that the banquet for a guest is being provided while the guest is en route to the house of Yahweh (the reference to goodness and constancy "following" or "accompanying" the guest comes [v. 6a] after the reference to the banquet [v. 5]). A host sets a meal before a guest when the guest arrives, not while the guest is still on the road.

For these reasons, I regard the metaphor of the shepherd and the sheep as being continued throughout the psalm. I explain the "banquet" as an excellent meal from a sheep's point of view. The "cup" that appears in v. 5c is not a literal cup, but an image for "fate, situation" (as in "let this cup pass from me" in Matt 26:39 and parallels); the Hebrew is literally "my cup is satiation" and not "my cup is full," or "runs over," suggesting that the cup, like the satiation, is abstract rather than concrete. I accept that anointing the head with oil is not obviously something a shepherd does to a sheep, though some have claimed that shepherds use oil to cleanse wounds that brambles and thorns have inflicted on sheep; I do not think that a greater problem for my interpretation than that of the banquet being spread for a guest by the host in the presence of enemies. I can accept that the shepherd treats the sheep like a guest (as he does throughout the psalm in providing food and protection for it), but not that the image of the host supplants that of the shepherd, or that the image of the guest supplants that of the sheep.

In short, I see no reason to think that the image of the sheep has disappeared from the poem at any point. Above all, the overriding sense of movement, which has run throughout the poem (lead, v. 2b; lead, v. 3b; walk, v. 4a; follow, v 6a; return, v. 6b) binds the poem together as a unity, as well as the named presence of Yahweh in the first and last cola.

2. *Deconstruction*

Like texts everywhere, Ps 23 relies upon a set of opposites, which prove on closer inspection to collapse into one another. In this poem the principal opposition is between life and death. The living sheep is everywhere threatened by death—by starvation, by thirst, by the gradual decay of life that constantly needs reviving, by harm, by the valley of darkness, by enemies. But the shepherd provides food and water, and protection from harm in general and from enemies in particular. In this pair of opposites, life is of course the privileged or favoured alternative: the poem begins with the assertion that the sheep lacks for nothing, and it ends with the conviction that the present state of happy affairs will continue for the foreseeable future, for "length of days." Death and the dark possibilities that threaten life are not ignored, but their power is contained by the greater powers that are on the side of life. Life and death, then, are the oppositional pair of concepts on which the poem relies.

However, we all know that in reality shepherds do not keep sheep for the sake of the sheep, as acts of altruism; they keep sheep for wool and for milk, indeed, but ultimately and usually for slaughter. The shepherd is thus in an equivocal position: he must keep the sheep alive and healthy—but only so that the sheep will be valuable when it is killed. His care for the sheep may not be insincere, but his purpose with the sheep is not its long-term or ultimate well-being but its death.

So the opposition between life and death, on which the poem relies, is deconstructed by the recognition that the shepherd stands on the side of death as well as on the side of life. The poem draws a veil over this conflict, and we need not suppose that the poet was conscious of the ambiguous position of the shepherd. And yet the poem is written; the words are there, and the words have a life of their own beyond what their author is likely to have intended.

At the end of the poem, the sheep arrives at the "house of Yahweh," the temple. Here the aspect of death lies just beneath the surface; for everyone knows that there is only one reason why sheep go to the temple. Even if I am wrong that the image of the sheep is continued throughout all six verses of the poem, and even if it is not a sheep but a guest that goes to the temple in v. 6, the deconstructive aspect is already present in the initial image of the shepherd. In other words, we cannot escape the deconstructive potentiality of the psalm, which—to some extent at least—undermines what it apparently means to say.

3. *Gender Criticism*

Shepherds in the Hebrew Bible can be male or female, though they are usually male; this shepherd is clearly male, for he has the name of a male, Yahweh. Further, he is strong like a man, for his weapons frighten off other animals who might threaten the sheep. There is a male bravado in him in his laying out a feast for the sheep in the presence of enemies—it may cause indigestion for the sheep, but it surely enhances the shepherd's own self-worth to know that he can provide for his sheep even under the most unpromising of circumstances.

The sheep of Ps 23 may be male or may be female; but biological sex is less important than (constructed) gender. This sheep is constructed as feminine, it is feminized by the male shepherd and its gender is determined by contrast with the masculinity of the shepherd. The sheep of the psalm is put in an utterly dependent position, totally reliant on the shepherd for food and drink, for direction and protection. The sheep has subjectivity, but not autonomy. It can express itself and its feelings, but it knows itself only in relation to the shepherd; it has no will of its own. It does not do anything of its own accord—except walk, and then it walks only when the shepherd says to, and in the path that the shepherd chooses.

But we are forgetting one thing: the sheep of Ps 23 is not just any old sheep; it is a metaphor for David. It is, according to the title of the psalm, David who speaks, in the voice of the sheep. The psalm is a psalm of David, who is himself famous as a shepherd, and so Yahweh is not so much the sheep's shepherd as the shepherd's shepherd. And the speaker of the psalm is not a male who has been feminized but rather a male who has been feminizing himself. Perhaps this male who is ventriloquizing the voice of a female is forgetting, not being a real female, that it is very odd to lay claim to subjectivity if one has no autonomy. But what he intends by his self-feminization is to uphold the male view that what a woman needs is a man to take care of her; David has an even bigger male than himself taking care of him, and that is why he becomes the feminized sheep.

4. *Materialist Criticism*

As a first step in a materialist criticism, we may note a material reality about sheep and shepherding that has been overlooked by literary criticism of the psalm. In the world of production and consumption—as distinct from the fictive world of the poem—shepherds typically do not

own sheep themselves, but tend sheep for another who pays their wages. The shepherd's first responsibility, then, is to the sheep-owner, not to the sheep. A materialist criticism will therefore take this sentimental picture of the mutual devotion of the sheep and the shepherd with a pinch of salt, and will feel certain that something is being hidden from us readers by the poet, to say nothing of the fundamental fact that is being hidden by the shepherd from the sheep—his ultimate intentions.

A second step in a materialist criticism may be to enquire after the possible causes of the text's production, a task that I would frame with the question: Why is there a Ps 23? It is not just the outpouring of a pious soul's experience of the divine. Texts are usually written for a social purpose. A text is a production, a product, made in order to be copied, to be circulated. That is what texts are, if they are not private texts like letters and contracts, but literary texts. Furthermore, an author of a text has had the intention of a readership for the work, and has had the conception of a public that would desire the work and would crave ownership of the work, either in order to read it again whenever they wanted, or to possess in some way what they saw as the essence of the work even if they never opened or unrolled it. All these things are of the nature of literary works, ancient and modern.

Why, in this context, is there a Ps 23? It can only be that someone has desired to recommend the adoption of the stance of passive acceptance of the divine direction of life that the psalm depicts. Why would anyone do that? Or rather, in whose interest would it be to do that? Will it not be someone who stands to benefit by the utter dependence of readers and users of the psalm upon religion, and by the desire implicit throughout the poem to make repeated journeys, however hazardous, to Jerusalem, in order to appear before God at the temple? Such a person is going to be, in all likelihood, a priestly or levitical person who is supported financially by the influx of travellers to Jerusalem for the festivals. The person who recommends the life of a sheep to his compatriots is not himself a traveller, since he resides in Jerusalem.

This depiction of the origin of the psalm does not claim to represent historical fact; rather, it is an attempt to identify the implied social setting of the text and its implied author. It is not a quest for the historical actuality that generated the text, but rather a sketch of the historical matrix that the text implies. Nor is it cynicism to suggest that people write religious poetry for the sake of their livelihoods. Even religious people have to live, and they have to do what is in their power to assure themselves of an income. Whether or not they are sincere in their expression of religious views is an entirely separate matter, and I for one am not suggesting that the author of Ps 23 is not a fervent believer.

5. *Postcolonial Criticism*

Psalm 23 is ripe for a postcolonial reading. It is almost an allegory of the situation of a colonized people. The imperial power, like the shepherd, would like it to be believed that it acts solely in the interest of the sheep, and the sheep is often complicit for a long time in that belief. The empire assumes as well that its sheep cannot care for themselves, but need the guidance and support of the empire for their wellbeing and safety. But the truth emerges in the end, that the imperial power acts ultimately only in its own interest. A postcolonial reader sensitized to the potentialities of this psalm will be able to create a solid and vivid reading of it. Not least, such a reader will warm to a deconstructive analysis of the psalm (such as that I have suggested above), in which the contradictions implicit in the relation of shepherd and sheep are unmasked.

From a postcolonial perspective we may also notice the image of the sheep being led through a dark valley. Readers of the psalm may have assumed that the shepherd takes the sheep through dark places because that is the only way he can reach the planned destination. But when the shepherd is understood as the imperial power, the postcolonial sheep may suspect that passage through the dark valley is the shepherd's choice, the better to maximize the dependence of the sheep on the shepherd and to ensure the shepherd's control of the sheep. When a shepherd of Australian flocks has to compel the sheep to move through a "force pen" into a sheep dip, for example, he is advised: "Paint the interior of the raceways black and leave the end of the race open to light."[10] Like a valley of darkness, the artificial blackness created by the shepherd, with an opening to light, subdues and controls the sheep.

6. *Psychoanalytic Criticism*

First, we may observe that in traditional form criticism, this psalm is often labelled a psalm of confidence. But confidence is in psychoanalytic terms known as wish fulfilment; hope and desire are by means of rhetoric transmuted into a form of certainty we call "confidence." Wish fulfilment knows of no half measures: everything wished for must be perfect. The sheep that is in the grip of wish fulfilment will always be perfectly well fed and watered, goodness and constancy will follow him all the days of his life, he will not only travel safely to the house of

10. Online: www.wool.com.au/Harvesting/Shearing_shed_guidelines/Sheep_behaviour/page_2186.aspx.

Yahweh now but will continue to return again and again. Such a belief is of course unrealistic, untempered by the ups and downs of real life, for it is, psychologically speaking, a fantasy.

Secondly, there is also evident in the psalm, from a psychoanalytic point of view, a death wish. Everything will inevitably lead to the slaughter of the sheep (as I have pointed out above), but no one is saying a word about it. If the sheep, like a real sheep, will concentrate on the here and now, on food and drink, he will live a happy life. But the moment he starts extrapolating his happy life into the future everything will go sour. For the outcome of even a happy life can only be death. Interestingly, when the sheep projects his life forward to the extreme degree he speaks of "as long as I live" and "for length of days"—as if life and days will go on for ever, as if they could never be terminated by death. But within the sheep, who is determined always to look on the bright side of life, there is present at the same time an unrestrained and unrestrainable desire to go up to Jerusalem, to the house of Yahweh. It is a fatal attraction, for the house of Yahweh is—from the point of view of a sheep, above all—a slaughterhouse; its desire for the house of Yahweh is a death wish, and this projection of its "confidence" into the indefinite future in the last verse is a silent acknowledgment that there is indeed a future state of permanence—but not on this side of death.

Thirdly, I revert to the observation I made earlier that the human speaker has represented himself as a wholly dependent sheep. Under the heading of gender criticism, this may be called a self-feminization, but now, from a psychoanalytic point of view, I would call it a self-infantilization. The sheep can do nothing for itself, but must rely on the shepherd for its daily food and drink, its sense of orientation, its defence from every kind of danger. This sheep will never grow up; it will never attain autonomous maturity. It will never be able to become a responsible creature, to make choices for itself, and to live with the consequences of its own actions.

Fourthly, I would draw attention to a feature of the psalm that is rarely if ever referred to, namely that the sheep represents itself as a lone animal locked into a one-to-one relationship with its shepherd. In reality, sheep are notoriously herd animals, their instinct for flocking together being an evolutionary mechanism that protects them against predators. Sheep have a need to keep visual contact with their herd, and single sheep will in reality almost always seek to make their way back to the flock. The sheep of this psalm, however, knows of no fellow sheep; he is a loner.

In psychoanalytic terms, we would call this solipsism, an unfortunate pathological state in which a person comes to feel that everything is a dream and nothing is real. It is commonly thought that infants are naturally solipsistic, and that it is only through the acquisition of language that they come to realize that others have experience that is much like their own. If a mature person suffers from pathological solipsism, that person becomes very lonely and detached, and eventually apathetic and indifferent to circumstances. The psalmist is therefore from a psychoanalytic point of view in a dangerous situation, recapitulating his infant experience and withdrawing from the reality of ordinary human intercourse. To live in a world in which nothing is lacking (v. 1), in which everything is safe and predictable, and in which one is responsible for nothing, and takes care of nothing, is fatal, from a psychological point of view. The sheep that has fallen into solipsism is, in a way, already dead, long before its arrival at Yahweh's temple.

Some may think that the tendency of this paper has been negative, perhaps even attempting to detract from the innocent delight the psalmist has in the protection of his God, and his sincere expression of a proper creaturely dependence on the Almighty. Perhaps it does, but that cannot be a reason for resisting its implications. For myself, Ps 23 is an exquisite and incomparably attractive poem upon which, unfortunately, an aura of unquestionable piety has settled. I think of it more as an old and well-loved friend about whom one has learned some sad and less than admirable truths: one cannot forget what one has learned, but the friendship is not threatened and is perhaps even strangely strengthened by the revelation of the imperfections.

Part IV

Receiving David

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Scenes of Textual Repentance and Critique/Confession: King David between the Renaissance and the Reformation, the Secular and the Sacred, and Samuel and Psalms

Yvonne Sherwood

This welcome invitation to write in tribute to David Gunn reminded me of the summer when, just out of my degree in English Literature at the University of Sheffield, I was contemplating moving just down the street and a few thousand disciplinary miles to Biblical Studies. I spent that summer devouring the work of three Davids (also a Gabriel and two Roberts, squeezed out here for the sake of thematic neatness[1]) and conjuring the shape and possibilities of an area I vaguely conceived of as "The Bible and Literature" or "The Bible and Theory" in my mind. It is daunting to think that the author who provided one of my first all-important interdisciplinary bridges has continued to write at the edge of those areas that he helped pioneer—although pioneer is not a word one would use easily of someone who has written so searchingly on issues of colonialism, space and identity. It is a pleasure to dedicate this essay to someone who has been so generous with his writing and his time.

A Lost Literary Beza

In the attempt to scavenge out a David and Bathsheba that David Gunn just possibly might not know in intimate detail, I landed on Théodore de Bèze, or Beza's (1519–1605) "Poetic Preface to David's Penitential Psalms." For those familiar with Beza as Calvin's successor at Geneva—known for being more Calvinist than Calvin and the author of the (in)famous Table of Predestination—the poem comes as something of a delicious surprise. With another piety, a piety to the Classics, acting as

1. The Davids?: Gunn, Jobling, Clines. The Gabriel and Roberts?: Josipovici, Alter and Carroll.

overarching license, Beza, of all people, translates the Bible into Greek and Latin—complete with polytheistic side effects and a loving anatomy of Bathsheba's body. The lavish recounting of sin, licensed to denouncing it as "sin," is reminiscent of medieval Books of Hours, where miniatures of Bathsheba bathing spice up the Penitential Psalms.[2] Though Beza's title frames the poem as a "preface" to Ps 51, the psalmic postscript follows silently, by implication, and functions as a mere pretext for an extravagant and exhibitionist performance of Bible in the style of Vergil—a performance that strives to make a name for the author as a humanist in the sixteenth-century sense of the word.

Here I am interested in the poem not only as an intriguing artefact in its own right, but as a study in self-formation and reformation, an occasion for comparing an "un-reformed" Beza (and David) with a "reformed" Beza (and David). The observations that result problematize our formations of "the religious" and the "secular"—a division temporally retrojected in the putative showdown between Reformation and Renaissance, Christian and "humanist" or pagan. Following Talal Asad and others,[3] I contest conventions of conceptual apartheid based on firm dividing lines between Church and State, spirit and material, heaven and earth.

Prior to the major self-refashioning of his re-formation/conversion—as a literary-rhetorical act, crafted from a patchwork of biblical texts[4]—Beza underwent an earlier self-refashioning, changing his given name from Dieudonné or Déodat to the Hellenized form Theodore, a more appropriate stage name for his literary début in Paris. Written at a time

2. Cf. Paul Saenger, "Reading in the Later Middle Ages," in *A History of Reading in the West* (ed. G. Cavallo and R. Chartier; Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press; Oxford: Polity, 1999 [Fr. 1995]), 146; David M. Gunn, "Bathsheba Goes Bathing in Hollywood," *Semeia* 74 (1996): 79–80.

3. For examples of the rich recent discussion on the construction of secularism, see Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), and Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, eds., *Secularisms* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2008).

4. Stephen Greenblatt writes of Renaissance self-fashioning but curiously underplays the debt to Bible/religion in his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). Beza's conversion narrative as most famously told in a letter to Wolmar is a biblical patchwork made up of excerpts from the resurrection of Lazarus, the resurrection, the prodigal son, Philemon's runaway slave, and the story of Abraham called to leave his native country (see Paul-Frédéric Geisendorf, *Théodore de Bèze* [Geneva: Alexandre Julien, 1967], 26–27). Like many such in the Renaissance/Reformation, Beza's narrative of self-fashioning or self-reformation relies on biblical motifs of re-creation or rebirth and putting on the new man (cf. Eph 4:24; Col 3:5–11).

before he came out as a Calvinist sympathizer,[5] the poem was part of the collection *Sylvae* (raw material; woodland; miscellany): a vogueish term in the 1540s (think the equivalent caché of "media," "technology" or "bodies"). It was published in 1548, the same year that he fled to Geneva, in a collection called *Juvenilia*. The title played into the fashion for rhetorical humility while at the same time strategically hinting at repentance from poetic works from a time when he had "thought as a child" (1 Cor 13:11). In fact, not least because the collection included the poem *De sua in Candidam et Audebertum benevolentia*—a King David-like proclamation that the love of man was preferable to the love of woman, which proved something of a PR gift for Beza's opponents—a more emphatic repudiation of his earlier writing was required.

Beza's lavish and voluptuous supplement of the biblical opens with Cupid straying into 2 Samuel which begins to feel, in contrast, a rather pale and spartan literary work:

> By chance winged Cupid, that mischievous boy, was roaming through the sky, over land, and over sea, when he paid a visit to the sacred cities of Judea, menacing them with his quiver as he carried his blazing darts in his hand. At some point, he was seeking hospitable lodging for the coming night. Now, as he flashes his keen eyes here and there, he's not sure where he'll stay. Finally, he casts his eyes on the beautiful figure of Bathsheba. At once he marvels at such rare endowments in a human body: the green eyes, broad forehead, blushing cheeks, a beautifully shaped nose, red lips, and tawny hair along an ivory neck, flat belly, long slender arms, and delicate fingers. While he observes all these things, he whispers in astonishment, "Why, gods above, do you praise the beauty of the heavens, the swift rotations, the starry fires, the features of mother Hera? When the wild virgin obstructs the lights of heaven, I should play

5. Meylan argues that Beza's break with the Catholic Church began as early as 1535 with a tract by Bullinger given to him by Wolmar; see Henri Meylan, "La conversion de Bèze ou Les longues hésitations d'un humaniste chrétien," *Geneva* 7 (1959): 103–25; reprinted in Henri Meylan, *D'Erasme à Théodore de Bèze* (Geneva: Librairi Droz, 1976), 145–67. Divisions between humanist and Christian, Catholic and Protestant were blurred in Paris in the 1540s: belief in the role of grace in salvation was shared by many Catholics, and separation was less in terms of right belief than in identification with the eucharist. Conversion was a way of making those identities sharper, defining a Protestant in opposition to a Catholic even as one "came out" as a Protestant; see Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Beneath the Cross: Catholics and Hugenots in Sixteenth Century Paris* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Thierry Wanegffelen, *Ni Rome ni Genève. Des fidèles entre deux chaires en France au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Champion, 1997); Alison Adams, *Webs of Allusion: French Protestant Emblem Books of the Sixteenth Century* (Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance 378; Geneva: Librairie Drosz, 2003).

> in those eyes; from there I'll have fun brandishing sharp arrows. This is an abode worthy of a god. Therefore, let the heavy quiver be far off, away with the arms. For these eyes provide weapons for me, and the curved shadow of her brow stretches my bow. And if I am not mistaken, people will know that from there I, Cupid, a mere boy, conquered once the martial hearts of kings, and this report will spread through cities far and wide."[6]

Cupid enters Bathsheba through the eyes and "buries himself in pure light." The scene is vaguely reminiscent of the Holy Spirit entering the Virgin Mary through the ears, but while Mary's ears function as a substitute for sexual organs, Bathsheba's eyes are sexualized as a metaphorical vagina. Cupid buries himself, Bathsheba is "happy to receive the guest," and henceforth she "thinks on nothing but the arts of Venus." The reader is situated as the mirror in which Bathsheba preens herself:

> Aware of her beautiful figure she smiles at it all; now she permits her uncombed locks of hair to play down over her forehead, then she tries on various hairstyles. Now she pretends to hide her belly, she pushes up her breasts, and above she throws a finely woven veil. Now she shows off all the wealth of her beauty; proud of her bare neck, she feigns a goddess with her lovely image.

A long way from the parsimonious and perfunctory biblical prose which tells us nothing more about Bathsheba's body than that she has recently had her period and that she is beautiful, the poem edges closer to a modern work like Joseph Heller's *God Knows*, which provides copious details on how exactly Bathsheba styles her hair.[7] David too, stands in the place of the mirror as Bathsheba puts on a "show" for him, bathing nude, her "eyes dart[ing] flirtatiously at him," initiating all that follows. The force of the female acts in conjunction with the divine force of Cupid to overpower the man in an act of reverse rape.[8] Without the use of "weapons," Cupid strikes the eyes of the "skilled and pious" king, the Renaissance man, adorned with hyperbole: "second to none in piety, the best of all poets, who poured forth honey from his sweet mouth as he strummed the lyre with his fingers." In a homoerotic and heterosexual

6. All citations from the prose translation by Kirk M. Summers, *A View from the Palatine: The Juvenilia of Théodore de Bèze* (Tempe: Arizona State University, 2001), 23–37.

7. Joseph Heller, *God Knows* (London: Black Swan, 1995). Heller's Bathsheba dyes her hair with saffron and loofstrife (p. 8).

8. On the seductive agency of the naked female body, see Gunn, "Bathsheba Goes Bathing," and Mieke Bal, *Reading Rembrandt: Beyond the Word-Image Opposition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 225.

encounter through the eyes, David, "bedazzled," is reduced to "trembling" as "Lord Cupid bursts in." His senses are "sprinkled with… poison"; he "blaze[s] with a sweaty heat down to his bones." The "victor" skewers/spears him, "inflicts a wound in his heart" and the mind "falls conquered," faltering, "overcome by flames." Cupid delights in his conquest—the most pious and supreme of kings, a formidable notch on his bedpost and, simultaneously, the sheath of his sword. The circle closes as David conquers Bathsheba and "Bathsheba gives in…pleased to commit the sin at this great man's instigation." As the familiar sequence of events are unleashed and David plots his "secret murder," the poet exclaims "So great is the power of Cupid! Cupid, along with his mother, simply ignores right and wrong." Extrapolating the theme of the deceptiveness of the letter in 2 Sam 11:15,[9] Beza imagines David writing Uriah's implicit death warrant at night, "while deceitfully pretend[ing] to write many things about the affairs of his country."

We could wax lyrical about the way in which Beza waxes lyrical in the empty desert spaces of biblical lacunae, but more interesting than the general idea of excess are two particular forms of that excess that seem particularly transgressive given all that we know about the name of "Beza." The first is the pluralization and Hellenization of God[s]; the second is the extravagant opulence that finds its apotheosis in the figure of a "King of the Gods" who sits on a very un-Protestant throne of gemstones and gold. Presiding over the narrative and pronouncing judgment is a biblical deity, shading into Jupiter and Zeus, who sits on Mount Olympus. (It's as if the biblical God is accidentally rediscovering the henotheism and polytheism that haunts his Old Testament selves.) Converting the Bathsheba affair into a scene closer to God's fury over the golden calf or David's census (2 Sam 24; cf. 1 Chr 21) the King of the Gods determines to avenge the "spilt blood" of his "innocent friend" on David and his dynasty and, at the same time, to *"wipe out an undisciplined people."*[10] In a scene closer to the polytheistic tumult in the heavens in ancient Near Eastern flood epics than the books of Samuel, what is threatened is the implosion of the earth and heavens, a return to primal chaos. As in the mythical flood epics, God's fury sets heaven

9. David's letter cryptically instructs his commanders to place Uriah in the frontline. It commands murder from at least one remove, and never makes its true spirit/intention explicit.

10. God's fury at David, the "shepherd given a crown, and rescued from the hands of a giant," becomes a symbol of all human beings who have fallen from the "divine mind" despite having been given the crown of quasi-kingly dominion over the world.

"abuzz" and the other members of the pantheon reel with anguish. In the midrashic-mythical debate that follows, the figure of Mercy prevails. Persuaded to confine himself, for now, to the punitive power of "thunderbolts" and Tartarus,[11] the darkest of underworlds, the King of the Gods dispatches a "lovely-headed" youthful angel, whose "long white garb play[s] around his feet" and whose "colourful fantastic wings… flash as if with gems glowing red, like a parrot brought from eastern lands, or like a rainbow glistening among the watery clouds." Donning the prosaic body of Nathan the prophet, the angel appears to David, eschews the biblical Nathan's circuitous ewe-lamb parable, and David reels with "instant regret." As with the stream-of-consciousness first-person narrative of *God Knows*, the excess over the biblical spills out not just into external description but into the inner recesses of the mind. Beza externalizes the exotic recesses of David's mind through the motif of a traveller in Libya, "Libya interior" being the very symbol of the inaccessible and barely known in the early sixteenth century.[12] The desert terrain of Libya interior, full of exotic animals and snakes and unmapped terra incognita in which one can lose oneself entirely, becomes an early modern equivalent of the Freudian *id*:

> [David] is like some traveller who sojourns in the thirsty land of Libya, and encounters a fierce tiger in the heart of the desert, or a spotted snake: He shudders at the sight, full of fear, and warily abandons the well-worn path, and looks for dark hiding places, trembling all the while. So did David feel as he gazed upon Bathsheba…Bathsheba fills his eyes, and yet no flame of passion ignites the lust within; Cupid along with his mother are conquered, and shameful fear alone rules now in his empty heart.

Bathsheba, as David's sin personified, is exoticized, turned wild, as the focus of poetic-aesthetic allure but also recoil. Even after desire, allegedly, has died, she fills the poem. She is the poem and its seductive power. David's reeling mind "turn[ing]…this way and that" contemplates suicide: hurling himself "headlong from the top of the citadel, or stab[bing] himself in the gut with a bloody sword." Finally, donning a prophet's hooded cloak, he climbs up the "arduous peaks of the steep mountain," to a "dreadful cave" which is to be his "home," his "confidant" and the lone "witness" of his "righteous sorrow," together with the

11. Both a deity and an underworld—lower than Hades—where guilty souls are imprisoned.

12. See, for example, "Libya interior" on the map of Africa from a 1513 Strasbourg edition of Ptolemy's *Geography* in Anthony Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 53.

"red moon"/Diana whose redness mirrors David's blush of shame. When he finally recovers himself enough to speak, he takes out the ivory lyre with which he has soothed his own and Saul's tormented psyche, and with "tear-swollen eyes," he makes a "pitiful wailing" as the "lyre echoes with sad laments."

Scenes of Textual Repentance I: Hearing the Bible's Aesthetic Confession

The sparse biblical text seems to be transformed into an artistic prize of the Renaissance, with all the trademarks of Renaissance allure and value: exoticized remoteness (Libya and tigers); idealized Renaissance bodies; marble Italianate palace gardens and "ivory lyres." Even the prosaic old prophet, Nathan, is transmogrified into a "lovely headed youth" whose gem-bedecked wings give him the appearance of a "parrot brought from eastern lands." But we need to resist the temptation to compare this sumptuous parrot-technicolour performance of David's affair to the lavish tapestries or opulent oil paintings of the "Renaissance" in contrast to the iconoclastic aesthetic of the Reformation(s). The early modern does not distil out into the secular/humanist and the religious (nor indeed the aesthetics of the "Protestant" and the "Catholic") quite so easily. "Humanism," a word first coined, like secularism, in the nineteenth century, is a dangerous concept prone to function as a "mirror" and a "trap."[13] Its *specific* sense—the *studia humanitatis*, modes of classically based study that laid the foundation for the Liberal Arts—is hard to detach from a larger, looming meaning: an emphasis on the human as opposed to the divine.[14] That old Burckhardtian story, that seems so quaint in its raw form but that still structures our chronologies, chronicles the birth of human consciousness and the Great Awakening from the dream of religion into objectivity and individuality. The story of the birth of the first "complete" men or "many-sided" men in the Renaissance relies on the retrojection of later (oversimplified) antitheses between

13. For humanism as mirror and a trap, see Marie-Madeleine de la Garanderie, *Christianisme et Lettres Profanes (1515–1535): Essai sur le mentalités intellectuels parisiens et sur la pensée du Guillaume Bude* (Lille: Université Lille III/Libraire Honore Champion, 1976), 3.

14. See, for example, Anthony Goodman and Angus MacKay, eds., *The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe* (New York: Longman, 1993); and Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (London: Duckworth, 1986). The term humanism was first coined in Germany in the nineteenth century and was apparently first used in English by Matthew Arnold.

religion and reason, the divine and the human, the captive of the divine and the self-made.[15] This poem, slipping deftly between the biblical and the "pagan," the divine and the human(ist), shadows the mobile identities of "Beza" and his contemporaries as they crossed between different modes of writing and different identities—identities only clarified in retrospect. A shifting name such as "Beza" reflects, in microcosm, the shifting boundaries of putative epochs, the blurring of worlds that we segregate as Protestant and Catholic and sacred and profane. In the mixed world of Paris in the 1540s and the climate of the early Reformation, where Protestantism has not yet seized on a clear counter-aesthetic, is it yet a recognizably un-Protestant move to put God on a throne of gems and gold?

My concern is not to make a historical, factual point by arguing that "theology and humanism" were "uncomfortable bedfellows" rather than "sworn enemies";[16] that such writers as Erasmus turned to the Greek authors to gain access to the original words of scripture; or that virtually all humanists were Christian. My questions are rather "What is happening here, to and within the biblical?" and "In what ways does it help to think of these moves as humanizing, or secularizing the sacred?" and "How do the categories of the secular and the sacred dissolve, rotate, and change?" Beza's transformations of the biblical hardly conform to secularization in the sense of Weberian "disenchantment," or *Verweltlichung*, "being made worldly."[17] If anything he seems to want to re-enchant the all-too-prosaic biblical and redeem it from a rather prosaic worldliness. The excess, verbosity, and grandiosity of the literary supplement points, more clearly than most supplements, to a double sense of devotion and *lack*.[18] Beza is giving to the Bible more of what might be expected of a bible: mysticism, angels, exoticism, cosmic drama, an absolutely transparent and unambiguous morality. The form of the supplement suggests, by implication, that the Bible as represented in the books of Samuel is too worldly, too amoral, too prone to go off at

15. See Jakob Burckhardt on the "Development of the Individual," in *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* (trans. S. G. C. Middlemore; London: Curwen Press, 1944 [1860 Ger.; 1878 Eng.]), esp. 81–85.

16. Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 12.

17. See Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (trans. Robert M. Wallace; Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1999 [1966]), 11.

18. For a now classic statement on the supplement as a mark of lack, insofar as the supplement adds and completes, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (trans. Gayatari Chakravorty Spivak; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

all-too-human tangents from the spiritual or the divine. In a nicely unexpected twist, the "humanist" supplement seeks to redeem the all-too-human in the Bible. It works like an act of textual repentance, bringing the text about David, as well as David, to a more perfect state. As David utters his "Forgive me," the Samuel narrative echoes that "Forgive me." We are only called to forgive the unforgiveable, to redeem the unredeemable, to interpret or supplement the text that presents itself as a problem.[19] As the silent psalm and God's forgiveness washes David's sin "whiter than snow" (cf. Ps 51:1, 2, 7), so the poetic preface answers a sin or lack in the biblical text.

Beza is not reducing the Bible to "myth" by placing it on a par with Greek myth. This anachronistic assumption relies on later conceptualizations of myth/religion as opposed to history, themselves close cousins of the dichotomy of religious versus secular. It draws on the later belief that the key challenge of modernity or secularization to the biblical was the challenge of historicity—an assault from the empirical arsenal of "fact." Beza's poem conveys a different sense of the inadequacy of the biblical letters. The problem is not historical referentiality but a poverty of style. The motif of biblical "white space" has fared well in late modernity, seeming to fit well alongside Rothko canvasses and a less-is-more modernist aesthetic. Yet the prosaic worldly style of Samuel seemed far less congenial in the context of a Renaissance aesthetic of loquacity and height. Like vernacular languages, just emerging at this time from the shadow of Latin, the Bible experienced a distinct cultural cringe in relation to the Greek and Latin. The Vulgate seemed newly vulgar in relation to the luxuriance of the rediscovered Greek and Latin Classics. The task taken on by the poem intimates a desire to make it more worthy of the attention (and desire) of kings and the European *literati*; to make the Bible seductive. Beza apostrophizes David as a "man second to none in piety, *the best of all poets*." The fullness and excess of the poem strives to paper over the disjunction between the Bible as we have it and what the best of all poets, and the best of all Gods, would write.

Hans Blumenberg argues that the secularization of Christianity has always had to do with an uncomfortable relationship with the Greek, and that the Renaissance represents a revival of this discomfort. But perhaps the novelty-effects of the Renaissance emerge not just through the revival of old discomforts, but a delicate renegotiation of old compromise agreements between the sacred-Christian and profane—if only,

19. See Jacques Derrida, "On Forgiveness" (trans. Michael Hughes), in *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (ed. S. Critchley and R. Kearney; London: Routledge, 2001), 27–60.

initially, at the level of style. To answer the accusation that the Bible was rude and poor in comparison with the Greek, the Church Fathers and Philo famously platonized scripture, while at the same time maintaining the Bible's privileged place at the origin, and in the hyperbolic heights. Augustine famously argued that "if the philosophers, particularly the Platonists, say something that is true and consistent with our faith," this is because they possess "silver and gold they have not produced for themselves,"[20] and have stolen from the mines of the biblical and of providence. If we plunder their texts we are, like the Israelites legitimately stealing from the Egyptians (Exod 12:35), engaging in righteous counter-"theft." Beza's poem seems transgressive because it intimates, at least on the aesthetic level, that the Classics possess more wealth/property than they have stolen from the biblical. The decoration of the biblical with Greek and Latin silver, gold and marble damages the equation of the Bible with the superlative, even as it seeks to restore the Bible to the aesthetic heights.

Scenes of Textual Repentance II: The Book of Psalms Hears the Book of Samuel's Confession

When Beza came out as a Calvinist, he marked his conversion by emphatically turning over a new page in writing. (Accusations of sodomy resulting from his *Juvenalia* made it all the more imperative to mark this new writing very clearly.[21]) In the preface to his first truly Protestant literary work, a dramatization of Abraham's sacrifice in 1550, he declares that henceforth he will dedicate himself to completing Clement Marot's translation of the Psalms and will devote the "little grace" that God has "given [him] for poetry" to "sing a song to God rather than to fashion a Petrarchan sonnet [*petrarquisier un sonnet*], make amorous ditties, or counterfeit the furies of the ancient Poets and blaze abroad the glory of the world."[22] Just as later constructions of the

20. Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, 70, citing Augustine, *De doctrina christana* 2.39–40 and 60.

21. Cf. p. 189, above.

22. Théodore de Bèze, "To the Reader/Au Lecteur," in *Abraham Sacrifiant, Tragedie Françoise*, in *Four Renaissance Tragedies* (ed. D. Stone; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966); translated into English as Theodore Beza, *A Tragedie of Abrahams Sacrifice* (trans. Arthur Golding; ed. M. W. Wallace; Toronto: University of Toronto Library, 1960 [1577]). Beza is referring here to highly influential French Psalter, begun by Clement Marot and completed by Beza in 1562.

secular relied on the production of an excluded religious other,[23] so here a proto-secular worldliness emerges as the truly spiritual creates a foil in the act of purifying itself. Striving for a distinct identity with emphatic boundary markers, Protestant writing defined itself through the antithetical logic of the "not…but"—*not* sex and human love *but* love of God, *not* classical literature *but sola scriptura*, *not* extravagant writing, *but* humble writing in *imitatio dei* or *imitatio biblia*—imitating the poverty of the biblical in *sacrificial* style. Since a perfectly sacrificial un-writing was thankfully impossible in practice, the most unambiguous marker of Protestant writing became an exclusive dedication to the Bible and, particularly, the Psalms. For the Reformers placed the Psalms—as the record of David's heart/spirit—firmly at the Old Testament's heart.

In practice, the literary work of the "new, re-formed Beza" shadows the "Poetic Preface." Though protestant identity was marked by repenting of the overtly humanist and contrasting the two (now starkly conflicting) devotions, the Reformers use the Psalms in the same way that the "un-reformed" Beza uses the Classics. The Psalms are used to spiritualize a biblical text that is, by implication, all too human, all too prosaic, all too "secular" (in a sense). As the record of the spirit and faith of David, the proto-Protestant, and the icon of what biblical literature was (read, should be), the Psalms have the power to elevate and sanctify the sacred text from inside. The traditional use of Ps 51 as an appendix to 2 Sam 11–12 expands into a broader mechanism whereby the Psalms, and what they represent of Bible, redeem and improve on Samuel and what it seems to misrepresent of Bible. When David cries "Forgive me," the book of Samuel echoes his "Forgive me," and the Samuel–Psalm sequence performs the forgiveness of David as character and all-too-human text. As David is washed "whiter than snow" and his transgressions are "blotted out" in Ps 51, the Psalms blot out lower Davids in a snowstorm or blizzard of pure spirit. It is no accident that Calvin never quite got around to publishing sermons on Samuel but wrote extensively on Psalms.

This is not just my own reading of what takes place between the Psalms and Samuel in Reformation readings. It was spelled out quite overtly by the Reformers. At a time when Christian Protestant identity was not tied to placing all parts of the Bible, equally, above critique, Luther declared that the "sweet book of David…though small, deserved

23. Cf. Ward Blanton, *Displacing Christian Origins: Philosophy, Secularity and the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

to be recommended above all others."[24] What made the Psalms so precious was their grasp on interiority; their status as "the very hidden treasure of [the] heart's feelings."[25] Even when trapped in "frigid" use through "chanting" they still had the power to transform the hearer, just as one can have one's "senses regaled" when passing through a "flowery and sweet-smelling meadow" even if one has no knowledge of the "peculiar nature and properties of the flowers and herbs."[26] It was the Psalms' unrivalled power to *record voice* that allowed them to outshine the intimidating literary wealth of the Classics and to redeem the lesser lower parts of the Bible. In their delineation of feelings in "their true and native colours" and in their "liveliness, or descriptiveness of expression," the Psalms could not, Luther asserted, "be equalled" by "Demosthenes or Cicero."[27] Following Erasmus's argument that "what differentiates man from other animals" is the "power of speech"—so much so that a dumb man is akin to a stone statue or a "brute beast"[28]—Luther contrasted the Psalms' intimate record of the "very inmost sensations and motions of the soul" with the Catholic "lives of the saints." The Psalms became a surrogate (better) confessional; a surrogate (better) *Lives*; a place where anxiety about the power of the Catholic could be registered and

24. Martin Luther, *A Manual of the Book of Psalms: or, the Subject-Content of all the Psalms by Martin Luther* (trans. Rev. Henry Cole; London: Seeley & Burnside, 1837), 3.

25. Ibid., 6 (my emphasis).

26. Ibid., 4.

27. Ibid., 9.

28. See the Erasmian conversation between Lion and Bear on how to bring up a human cub in J. K. Sowards, ed., *Collected Works of Erasmus: Literary and Educational Writings* 4 (*De Pueris Instituendis* and *De Recta Pronuntiatione*) (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 369 (*Opera omnia Desiderii Erasmi Roterodami* [Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1969–], 1–414). Lion says that "the outward form does not make a man. Statues have that. It is the mind which makes us men or animals" and cites Galen: "I have learnt from Galen that what differentiates man from other animals, or brutes as they are called, is not reason, but speech." Luther writes: "Thus all other histories and lives of the saints, which describe their acts and works only, when compared to the Book of Psalms, set forth to us nothing more than dumb saints; and everything that is recorded of them is dull and lifeless… A dumb man, indeed, is rather a lifeless post than a man; for man is distinguished from the brute creation by nothing more than by the power of speech. A stone even, under the hand of the artificer, may represent the figure of a man. And, as to eating and drinking, all dumb animals can use the organs of sense as well as he: and indeed, as to strength of body, they have greatly the advantage of him. Hence, it is the power of speech that so distinguishes man from, and raises him above, the brute creation: and that speech is the index of, and the mirror that reflects, the mind" (Luther, *Psalms*, 6).

answered. The Psalms recorded true beating, pulsating human life in contrast to the statuesque, sub-human, dead *Lives*.

Luther's target may be overtly extra-scriptural but it is covertly inner-scriptural. He writes, very carefully: "In other scriptures and histories [the phrase seems to blur the lines between other scriptures and other parts of scripture]…only the works and bodily exercises of the saints are described: you have very few histories which give you the words, expressions, and sighs of the saints, which are the indexes of the state of their minds."[29] The phrase "other scriptures and histories" recalls other doggedly historical-narrative parts of the biblical canon that leave precious little room for interiority or voice. According to the Erasmian–Lutheran argument, although they move and act (and actually do far too much for their own good, to be honest), the Davids of Samuel are like subhuman statues in contrast to the David of the Psalms. "I had much rather hear David or any such eminent saint *speak* than merely see the works or exercises of his body; so much rather would I know the inmost thoughts of David's heart, and the inward conflicts and struggles of his faith," Luther writes; and again: the Psalms "give you not only the outward David, but, more expressively still, the inner David; and that *more descriptively* than he could do it himself, if he were to talk with you face to face."[30] John Calvin similarly deems the Psalms "The Anatomy of all the parts of the soul."[31] Since *anatomy* is a fashionable literary word, like *Sylvae*, the concept of the Psalms-as-Anatomy covertly asserts that the Bible outflanks classical rivals such as "Demosthenes or Cicero."[32] The Psalms are also that fashionable Renaissance commodity and trope—the "Glass" or "Mirror," a place where "you may see the inmost part of you" (cf. *Hamlet* 3.4 19–20). And in that glass, according to Calvin, "All the disquieting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated, the Holy Spirit hath here pictured to the life."[33] The Psalms function as a surrogate (textual) confessional, stripped of priestly mediation—a place where we can dig out "sin's every lurking place" and confess our most shameful deeds and thoughts in private.[34] Psalm 51 is the very icon and pinnacle of the book that is itself the icon and pinnacle

29. Luther, *Psalms*, 6.

30. Ibid., 8, 6.

31. John Calvin, *A Commentary on the Psalms of David, by John Calvin in Three Volumes* (3 vols.; Oxford, 1840), 1:vi. The translation is based on Arthur Golding's sixteenth-century translation and no single modern translator is named.

32. Luther, *Psalms*, 9, as above.

33. Calvin, *A Commentary on the Psalms of David*, 1:vi.

34. Ibid., 1:viii.

of the Bible. For it takes us into a private secret chamber, reserved for God, David and the reader, and permits us to see even King David's reddening face.

In Protestantism, David's Psalms became the image of the true heart or nature of the Protestant Bible. As Manfred Schneider argues, the Reformation invested print with the "absolute visual spirituality of scripture," and the Pauline and Lutheran belief that one can see through the "blackness of the printed letters" to the voice/spirit.[35] The Psalms slotted into the very heart of that schema by replacing mediation—by priests and ritual chanting—with the direct communication that makes mediation invisible, heart-to-heart and face-to-face. The Reformation Psalms were perhaps the earliest instance of what Schneider calls the Western myth of the printed word as a "psychogram in the Beyond of Letters."[36] In the Psalms, the materiality of the letter seemed to disappear in the luminous transparency of the spirit and the individual (Davidic) soul or heart.

Thus the printing of the Psalms became one of the most potent icons of the beginning of a new time: the time of Reformation and unmediated reading. Beza, who not only completed Marot's translation of the Psalms but laboured on an extensive paraphrase and commentary on the Psalms, extolled the power of print as invisible intermediary. In the tiny, affordable and personal (pocket) edition held in my Library's Special Collections, the preface to the English translation of his paraphrase proclaims (in very tiny letters) how "even the simplest poor man for a smal peece of monie may by diligent reading in this Booke of that rare man Theodore Beza, attaine to a better understanding of these holie Psalmes of David than in the old time the great learned men were able, by perusing of manie of the great Doctors of the Church."[37]

Beza now rereads in good Protestant fashion by devoting himself exclusively to the pious sequel to the Bathsheba affair. But for all that he attempts to draw a firm line between his Parisian and his re-formed selves, there are marked similarities between his two Davids. In both, the

35. Cf. Manfred Schneider, "Luther with McLuhan," in *Religion and Media* (ed. Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber; Cultural Memory in the Present; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 198–215 (210–11 and 213).

36. Ibid., 213.

37. Beza, *The Psalms of David, truly opened and explained by paraphrasis, according to the right sense of every psalme. With large and ample arguments before every psalme, declaring the true use thereof... Set foorth in Latine by that excellent learned man Theodore Beza. And faithfully translated into English by Anthonie Gilbie* (London: Henrie Denham, 1581), Glasgow University Special Collections, Sp Coll Euing Df-h.38. "To the Reader," no page nos.

emphasis is on interiority (the movements of David's heart and mind and spirit); in both, David functions as a mirror for all imperfect human beings (though Reformation theology ratchets up this sense of imperfection); and in both the response to David is pious and protective, at least partially exonerating him by the partial transference of guilt.

The "new" Beza repeats his old reading strategies—not least consecration through superlative. Psalm 51 is superlative in three respects: the person of David ("a most mighty king and a most holy prophet"); the nature of the sin ("most horrible adultery, joined with manslaughter"); and the most thorough account of repentance ("I see not what can be required as wanting in it: sith David confesseth, that he was guilty of eternal damnation, even from the first moment of his conception, and most exquisitely searches forth all the circumstances of his offence").[38] The Beza who once supplemented literary lack with classical plenitude now relies on a related mechanism: filling up the lack of the Old Testament with a surfeit of Christian doctrine, glimpsed proleptically/prophetically by David, and, using these intimate Davidic "letters" as a bridge to the Pauline letters and so to the spirit that redeems and supplements the literalism of the letter. In Marot and Beza's translation, Ps 51 becomes a gigantic sounding board for God's "*grace inéfable*" and "*grace salutaire*."[39] In Beza and Calvin's commentaries, through God's grace and readerly ingenuity, the very magnitude of David's crime leads to the fortuitous discovery, in David's heart and so the heart of the Old Testament, of two cardinal points of Reformation doctrine: the inefficacy of sacrifices and masses (cf. Ps 51:16–17) and original sin. Verse 5, "Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me," is seized on by both Beza and Calvin as a "striking testimony in proof of original sin entailed by Adam upon the whole human family," confirming that "sin was hereditary, descending in the human family by contagion."[40] Calvin goes further. "Deliver me from bloods" (51:14) refers not to the local and particular blood of Uriah but

38. Beza, on Ps 51, in *The Psalms of David*, 112–13. All the following citations from Beza can be found on these two pages.

39. "*Fai que la joie entre au fond de mon coeur, / Veuille oublier combien je suis coupable, / Mes os brisez reprendont leur vigeur / Par les secours de ta grace inéfable*" and "*O crée en moi je te prie un coeur net, / Tout enflamée du desir de te plaire, / Et renouvelle en moi pour cet éfet / Ton Esprit saint, ta grace salutaire*," from *Les Psaumes de David, sur le chant de ceux de Marot et de Beze. Nouvelle version, Mis en rime* (London: 1737). Online: http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO.

40. John Calvin, *A Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (trans. James Anderson; 5 vols.; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1846), 2:290–91.

to the universal human bloodguilt that led to Christ's crucifixion. In an ingenious twist, Beza makes grace spill back into the book of Samuel by arguing that the very writing (and printing) of this event—the fact that we can hold it and its aftermath in our pockets—is an act of grace. A king who according to sixteenth-century conceptions of law and sovereignty could have never been compelled to account for his crimes publicly, like some sixteenth-century Bill Clinton, graciously "suffer[ed] the source of his crime to be put in writing." King David allowed the David–Bathsheba episode to be put in writing, "laying aside all human respect." Moreover, he left Ps 51 as a "perpetual testimonie of his acknowledging of the fact, thereby to satisfy the whole church." The David who penned a duplicitous letter is exceeded and framed by a David who commanded the writing-up of this event, and who added Ps 51 as, as Calvin puts it, "some lasting proof" of his repentance for "posterity."[41] This precious letter, generously given to us by a God and king who owe us nothing, is the true metonymy of the Bible. It is an expression of the Bible's true character and confirms the character of David. As Luther puts it, "the work [of the Psalms] proves the workman"—and vice versa.[42] The Psalms and David mutually enforce one another, as testimonial to the exemplarity of David and that most precious of biblical commodities: first-person testimony.

These reconceptions of the letter of, or, better, letters in the Bible—now understood as personal acts of grace or records of the spirit—redeem the dubious and salacious acts of 2 Samuel and, in a sense, make adultery and murder "worth it."[43] Though God, Beza and Calvin hardly condone David's sin,[44] it is the very heinousness of the crime that allows for the discovery, in the heart of David and the heart of the Old Testament, of those particularly Protestant truths of original sin, salvation and grace. If the author of the "Poetic Preface" was already in the business—like God—of saving David, Protestant doctrine and the mechanisms of Protestant soteriology make that saving of David even more sure and safe. In the "Poetic Preface," culpability is drawn away from David and onto the amalgam Cupid–Hera–Bathsheba and is diffused

41. Ibid., 2:281.

42. Luther, *Psalms*, 6.

43. "The commoditie of true repentance doth here most evidently appeare, in that God doth never forsake those that are truly penitent: but contrariwise turneth even their very sinnes, both to his glorie, and their amendement and comforts," Beza affirms.

44. "I know not whether…any monument be extant of so many heinous crimes proceeding out of one fact," writes Beza.

through general human weakness (the Mind vs. Passion). David is not innocent, but neither is he exceptional or solely to blame. In the Protestant reading, the extreme sin even of David is turned into evidence of Satan's universal empire, extending even unto the most pious of kings.[45] A seemingly exceptional crime is transformed into an instance of the universal law of sin from which *even David* cannot be exempt. David has only one sin; that sin is exceptional given his true character; and, moreover, that sin very usefully shows that even the king is *subject* to sin's dominion. Just like classical "passion," but far more voraciously and systematically, the "dominion of sin" extends to "every part of the soul" exposing the "mind and heart of man" as "utterly corrupt."[46]

And yet, the very attempt to redeem David exposes the anxiety, an anxiety that Calvin makes explicit. He reads David's words, "so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless in your judgment" (Ps 51:4), as a disclaimer on David's part making it clear that God is in no way implicated in or contaminated by his sinfulness. The defence is addressed to silenced but obliquely referenced voices, ostensibly in ancient Israel but actually in mid-sixteenth-century Europe. "Many must have been disposed to conclude, considering the close connection into which God had adopted David, that he was implicated in some measure in his fall. David, however, repels an insinuation so injurious to the divine honour," Calvin proclaims.[47] The need for the categorical denial arises from the biblical description of David as the man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22), transforming God and David into Siamese twins joined at the heart. Much is at stake in David's forgiveness and the annexing of Ps 51 and the Psalms in general to the books of Samuel. David's forgiveness is 'tied to the act of forgiving the lack of the biblical, the purification of the biblical and the necessary assertion of the blamelessness of God.

Beyond the Secular/Sacred Divide: Critique and Confession

If the binding together of David, God and the Bible was already an issue in the Reformation/Renaissance, it became an even more overt problem in the "Enlightenment" (to adopt, for now, the clumsy epochal

45. "Nothing but satanic influence can account for that stupor of conscience which could lead him to despise or slight the divine judgment, which he had incurred" (Calvin, *Psalms*, 2:282).

46. Ibid., 2:291.

47. Ibid., 2:288–89 (my emphasis).

characterization even as we suspend leaden stories of secularization in which, say, the "Davids of Reason" oust the "Davids of Faith"). In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe, the character of King David became a public *cause célèbre*[48] precisely because his character was seen as a cipher and a human surrogate for theology and the nature of the Bible. David's character became a forum for discussing the Bible's and God's good character. The holy trinity of David–God–Bible was hotly debated in tracts with titles such as *The History of the Man after God's own Heart*.[49] When we look closely at the re-readings of David by so-called "Deists,"[50] such as the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713) or Pierre Bayle (1647–1706),[51] we find that they can be read, like Beza's Renaissance reading, as on a continuum with the Reformation readings—even though that continuity eventually goes so far as to get marked as contrast, eventually appearing, misleadingly, as nothing but contrast. If one of the defining characteristics of secularization is presumed to be criticism in the sense of *krino* ("to separate," "to decide," "to judge," "to accuse") this seems to relate, in a complicated

48. For surveys of the literature, see Alex Barber, "'I resolved to give an account of most of the persons mentioned in the Bible': Pierre Bayle and the Prophet David in English Biblical Culture," in *Scripture and Scholarship in Early Modern England* (ed. A. Hessayon and N. Keene; Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 231–47; and Frank E. Manuel, *The Broken Staff: Judaism Through Christian Eyes* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 206–8.

49. Anonymous [John Noorthouck], *The History of the Man after God's own Heart* (London: 1761), 82–83. Online: http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO.

50. Like "humanist," "Deist" is a potent, overdetermined word and a spectre of print, bound, in advance, to all that we understand by secularization. These pre-understandings mask the complex positions taken in relation to the biblical material by the "Deists" and their orthodox opponents (often as close as between the former and latter Beza or the readers of the "Renaissance" and the "Reformation"). As with the Renaissance, the sense of transgression that defines "Deism" emerges primarily at the level of style, though in a different way. Everything depends on the tone taken towards the Bible: the mode of address and the preservation, or not, of the Bible's status among the gentlemen.

51. See Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (ed. J. M. Robertson; 2 vols. in 1; Introduction by Stanley Grean; New York: Bobbs-Merill, 1964 [1711]), 1:229–30; Pierre Bayle, "David," in *A general dictionary, historical and critical: in which a new and accurate translation of that of the celebrated Mr Bayle, with the corrections and observations printed in the late edition at Paris is included... By the Reverend Mr. John Peter Bernard; the Reverend Mr Thomas Birch; Mr John Lockman, and other hands* (10 vols.; London: G. Strahan, J. Clarke, T. Hatchet, 1743–41), 4:532–43. Online: http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO. For the French text, see http:/pagesperso-orange.fr/dboudin/zEtudes/Bayle/Dict/05/David_1702.html.

way, to God's judgment of the human and the role of biblical religion as judgment of the inadequacy of the human. Crucially, *the effects that we call, retrospectively, "secularization," seem to come about first through the extension of the Bible's own critique, which is also God's critique of the inadequacy and sinfulness of the human.* The theological truism that we humans are all-too-human is extended to (parts of) the Bible. The Bible increasingly became subject to terms that it had itself generated for managing its own complexity, such as the axiomatic Pauline contrast between the spirit and the letter (2 Cor 3) and the paradigm of the Fall. In the so-called "Deist" readings, the biblical truth of the sins of David—acknowledged by the Bible, by God and David—is used as a foothold and expanded. It is expanded not just in the sense that the named sins of David multiply well beyond the one sin acknowledged by the Bible and the Reformers, but in the sense that *David's imperfection expands to include the text and its author and the words on the page.* The sins around David come to include not just lapses in David's character, but sins of miswriting, lapses in the written characters. The lack of the text presumed in former acts of textual repentance is made transparent. The text and its author become, *overtly*, imperfect and all-too-human; too partial (biased). To use Pierre Bayle's word, which implies the deviant/peculiar/particular/individual/partial as a fall from the general/universal (and the Deist readings are very concerned to save, the universal and God-as-universal), they become altogether too *particulier.*[52]

By wielding our inflexible dichotomies (Secularity and Religion, Reformation and Enlightenment, Faith and Reason) and by thinking of critique as something purely secular (a prison break-out from the veils, dreams and chains of religion), we have missed some crucial links between critique and Christian concepts, such as sin, judgment, forgiveness and repentance. We have missed ways in which the "Enlightenment" may (also) be on a continuum with the Reformation, which in turn is hardly an antithesis to the Renaissance. We have been too eager to encapsulate—or serialize, in epochs—the history of the West as a curious flip-flop between the secular, the sacred, then the secular again, thinking of religion as something that comes and goes, of which there is "more" and "less." Like the readings studied in this essay, Enlightenment readings of David have recourse to the beyond of the letters: the true

52. For Bayle, *un particulier* is both a particular person, an individual (like David), and that which militates against the "general interests of morality." The cardinal principle of interpretation is that the reputation of a particular person (*un particulier*) or a particular text should never be protected the expense of universal truth and ethics.

spirit, the necessary supplement. They extend and redeflect the criticism of human sinfulness and fallenness typical of the Calvinist stance towards biblical characters, which in turn reflects the searing critical scrutiny of the divine eye and divine judgment. The text's lack and the need for supplementation, going outside, is made more explicitly than could be dreamt of by Beza and his contemporaries. Yet this breaking out, going beyond, *shares* with earlier readings structures of sacrifice and playing God with the text.

The Reformation/Renaissance secures the sacrifice and obliteration of the all-too-human texts of Samuel. The mundane (secular?) narrative is forgiven—covertly—by deploying the Bible's own mechanisms of repentance and forgiveness. As God forgives David and blots out his transgressions, so the higher, more spiritual presence of the Psalms blots out the lower text. If critique is separation, judgment, decision, accusation, what is this but "critique"? The decision is made for the Psalms above Samuel. The accusation and redemption of Samuel as lower (almost Catholic) *Life* of David is made using the inner-biblical vehicle of the Psalms as the sign of the true character of David and the Bible itself. In the "Enlightenment," the already mobile "true Bible" moves, at least partly, outside the Bible. Parts of the text become explicitly less than divine, fallen, explicitly human-vulgar, non-gentlemanly, outwith the circle of the humane.[53]

Thinking outside a tedious and unproductive contrast between a time when readers were circumscribed within the text in faith, obedience and submission (before "critique" and before the rise of reason) and the time of the Enlightenment, when "secularizing" readers broke out, or took over God's role and subjected God and the biblical to judgment, we can formulate the relationship between sin, critique and judgment in more interesting ways—ways that seek to do justice to the complex and subtle interpretative mechanisms placed on texts and canons. It is an intriguing thesis, and hopefully of a piece with some of David Gunn's insightful observations on the nature of interpretation, that the judgment of the interpreter mimics divine judgment in complex ways, not least because interpretation is about making more perfect, doing justice, bringing sins and omissions into the open. What is the dream of ongoing progress in interpretation but a dream of ever more thorough repentance, purification, revelation? At this point the sequence of David's sin, prayer, and forgiveness/amelioration—even plastic and compliant in the hands of the interpreter—offers itself as model of the interaction between the

53. Shaftesbury in particular writes in terms of the inhumanity and ungentlemanliness of David and the biblical texts.

supplicant (the text and the history of its interpretation) and the interpreter. Texts that are interpreted are always, in a sense, declaring their sinfulness lack, or fallenness. They are always, in a certain sense, begging for forgiveness. We play God when we supplement them and hear their true spirit or confession.

From Babylon to David and Back Again: The Sexually Charged History of a Victorian Drawing*

Burke O. Long

Simeon Solomon (1840–1905) was the first Anglo-Jewish artist to promote himself as a painter of biblical subjects and contemporary Jewish life. These were not his only subjects. It is noteworthy, however, that one of his earliest works, *Eight Scenes from the Story of David and Jonathan* (1856), drew directly on the books of Samuel. Also, Solomon's debut offering at the prestigious Royal Academy featured a biblical scene, *Isaac Offered* (1858). That painting was followed by other Academy exhibitions in subsequent years, including *The Mother of Moses* (1860), *A Young Musician Employed in the Temple Service During the Feast of Tabernacles* (1861), *The Child Jeremiah* (1862), *The Betrothal of Isaac and Rebeka* (1863), and *Judith and her Attendant Going to the Assyrian Camp* (1872).

Solomon gained early public acceptance through the socially privileged genre of biblical illustration. From the mid-1860s, however, he transferred much of his energy to non-Jewish and classical themes, through which he expressed the ideals of writers and artists of the Aesthetic Movement.[1] His subjects became impersonal and mythical, more Hellenic/Roman rather than Hebraic. Hauntingly enigmatic, often

* I dedicate this essay to my good friend and long-time colleague, David Gunn. By sheer force of example, he has shown many of us how to cross the borders of antiquarian biblical studies and keep moving, taking up with social scientists, visual and film artists, literary critics, and historians of popular culture. *Have courage*, I imagine him telling us. *Learn from anyone who enhances your ability to read the Bible with critical intelligence and grasp what it has come to mean over some two millennia.*

1. Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West* (2d ed.; London: Routledge, 1994), 64–65; Tim Barringer, *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 157–58.

androgynous figures suggested sanctified youth and beauty,[2] and perhaps dissident same-sex longings.[3] Solomon never abandoned traditional Jewish subjects, however.[4] And he sometimes infused biblical images with classicist style and a taste for allegory as seen in *Song of Solomon* (1868) and *Eight Designs for the Song of Songs* (1878).[5]

Simeon Solomon had both admirers and critics during his lifetime. After his conviction in 1873 for attempted sodomy, he had more critics, even among his friends, many of whom negotiated their own position in Britain's homophobic society by abandoning him or offering only guarded praise. Sir William Blake Richmond recalled that the young Solomon, friend and fellow art student was a "Jew of the Jews…facile and spasmodically intense, sensitive to extreme touchiness, conscious of his great abilities, proud of his race but with something of the mystic

2. Simon Reynolds, *The Vision of Simeon Solomon* (Stroud: Catalpa, 1985), 23.

3. Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective*, and "A Vision of Love: Homosexual and Androgynous Themes in Simeon Solomon's Work after 1873," in *Solomon: A Family of Painters* (Geffrye Museum Exhibition Catalogue; London: Inner London Education Authority), 31–35; Colin Cruise, "A Certain Effeminacy and Morbid Mysticism: 'Late' and 'Later' Solomon and his Audiences," in *From Prodigy to Outcast: Simeon Solomon—Pre-Raphaelite Artist* (London: Jewish Museum, 2001), 23–29; Elizabeth Prettejohn, "Solomon's Classicism," in *Love Revealed: Simeon Solomon and the Pre-Raphaelites* (ed. C. Cruse; London: Merrell, 2005), 39–45.

I avoid using terms such as homosexual, homosexuality, or heterosexual in essentialist ways, that is, as though the words indicate a natural, unchangeable fact independent of linguistic, historical, and social contexts. The word "homosexual" was coined only in 1869, when Solomon was 29 years old, and then as a pathologizing clinical term invented from a social position of heterodominance. It did not come into general use until some years later. I view sexual identities, by whatever signifiers, as constructed, value-laden and unstable products of historical and social processes. See David F. Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

4. Other examples include *Ruth, Naomi and the Child Obed* (1860); *Carrying the Scrolls of the Law* (1867); scenes of contemporary Jewish life, originally published in two periodicals: "Illustrations of Jewish Customs," *Leisure Hour* 15 (1866): 73, 168, 217, 329, 377, 476, 540, 604, 653, 823, and "Jews in England," *Once a Week* 7 (1862): 192–93. Also note *King Solomon* (1872/1874); six illustrations for *The Book of Ruth* (Hollyer 1879), and six designs for *Dalziel's Bible Gallery* (Edward Dalziel and George Dalziel, *Dalziel's Bible Gallery* [London: George Routledge & Sons, 1881]; Donato Esposito, "*Dalziel's Bible Gallery* (1881): Assyria and the Biblical Illustration in Nineteenth-Century Britain," in *Orientalism, Assyriology and the Bible* (ed. S. Holloway; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 286–87; Steven Kolsteren, "Simeon Solomon and Dalziel's Bible Gallery," n.p. (cited January 2007), online: http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/skolsteren.

5. A more frankly homoerotic allegory on the sexual ambiguities of earthly and divine love is *The Bride, Bridegroom and Sad Love* (1865).

about him which was Pagan, not Christian." Richmond was enthusiastic about Solomon's early biblical subjects, but in hindsight he was grieved, or perhaps embarrassed, at his friend's development. "There are few more melancholy figures in the history of genius," he wrote, "than that of this vivid young Jew with his poetical soul and distorted mentality, a prey to forces against which he was powerless to battle."[6]

Solomon died a penniless alcoholic. Memorial exhibitions at the Baillie Gallery in 1905 and the Royal Academy in 1906 drew mixed receptions.[7] The artist seemed destined for obscurity, even though an American, Julia Ellsworth Ford, published a sympathetic survey of his work soon after he died.[8]

However, changing social attitudes, the development of feminist and gender studies in the academy, three major exhibitions of Solomon's work (Geffrye Museum 1985; Jewish Museum 2001; Birmingham City Museum 2005), and numerous studies of the artist have given Solomon a valued place in the history of Victorian British art.[9] He has now become a gay cultural icon with a web site and a heroic status to be invoked in struggles for gay rights.[10]

Among Simeon Solomon's early Hebraic works is a delicately colored pen and ink drawing, *Babylon*, which was first exhibited in London during the winter of 1859–60.[11]

6. Quoted in Reynolds, *The Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 5–6.

7. Cruise, "A Certain Effeminacy," 27–28, and *Love Revealed*, 11.

8. Julia Elsworth Ford, *Simeon Solomon: An Appreciation* (New York: Frederic Fairchild Sherman, 1908).

9. Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective*, xv–xxi, 65–70; Gayle Seymour, "The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon (1840–1905)" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Santa Barbara, 1986), and "Simeon Solomon and the Biblical Construction of Marginal Identity in Victorian England," *Journal of Homosexuality* 33 (1997): 97–119; James Saslow, *Pictures and Passions: A History of Homosexuality in the Visual Arts* (New York: Viking, 1999).

10. James Collard, "The Agony and the Ecstasy of Simeon Solomon," *Out* (May 2000): 66–71; Roberto Ferrari, "Simeon Solomon Research Archive," n.p. (cited September 2007), online: http://www.simeonsolomon.org; Henry A. Sandberg, "The Androgynous Vision of a Victorian Outsider: The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 2000); R. Aldrich and G. Wotherspoon, eds., *Who's Who in Gay and Lesbian History* (2 vols.; London: Routledge, 2001); Roberto Ferrari, "From Sodomite to Queer Icon: Simeon Solomon and the Evolution of Gay Studies," *Art Documentation* 20 (2001): 11–13; Ray Anne Lockard, "Simeon Solomon," in *The Queer Encyclopedia of the Visual Arts* (ed. C. Summers; Berkeley: Cleis, 2004), online: http://www.glbtg.com.

11. *Winter Exhibition of Cabinet Pictures, Sketches, and Watercolour Drawings* (London: Gambert's French Gallery, 1859–60); Donato Esposito, of the University

Fig. 1. Simeon Solomon, *Babylon* (1859).
© Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, 2008.

The printed catalogue included a quote from Jer 51:7 alongside the title: "Babylon hath been a golden cup, which hath made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunken of her wine, therefore the nations are mad." A critic noted at the time that the "unwise but clever" artist produced works that were "surprisingly daring and imaginative for a youth." *Babylon* in particular, he added, had a "weird oriental feeling [that was] highly commendable."[12]

For many years, this original title and reference to Jer 51 were lost. When acquired by the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in 1925, the drawing was known simply as *King David* and in 1964 a Birmingham curator associated the image with David and Abishag (1 Kgs 1:1–4).

of Plymouth, UK, furnished me a copy of Gambart's exhibition catalogue and graciously answered many inquiries. Roberto Ferrari, of City University New York Graduate Center, also cheerfully responded to my questions. Ferrari maintains an extraordinarily rich website devoted to electronic and print resources for the study of Simeon Solomon. I am indebted to both scholars for thoughtful suggestions as I made final revisions to this essay.

12. Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 77.

After a renaissance of Simeon Solomon studies got underway in the 1980s, Simon Reynolds reproduced the same drawing with the title *David Playing to King Saul*.[13] The very next year, Emmanuel Cooper labeled it *David Playing Before Saul*.[14] Soon thereafter, Gayle Seymour restored the drawing's original association with ancient Babylon.[15]

From Babylon, to David and Abishag, to David playing to (or before) Saul, then back again to Babylon. These shifts suggest different ideational spaces configured between visual image and biblical text, which in turn mark dissimilar appropriations of both Solomon's drawing and the Bible.

Titles of artworks can change over time for a variety reasons, of course, including viewer-critics' mistakes, inadequate information and research, artist's decisions, and confusion occasioned by printed gallery materials and multiple works on similar subject matter. Some changes in title, even if induced by error or ignorance, may nevertheless be consequential for understanding more fully the social circumstances in which a given work of art was produced and received. In such cases, as I argue in this essay, tracing a history of alternate titles helps us grasp something of the social processes through which Simeon Solomon, like the art he produced, emerged in language and commentary, bound to cultural context and discourse.

King David

For more than half a century, the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery knew *Babylon* as *King David*. No records survive to explain how the drawing acquired this title, which the museum carried forward into the published catalogue of its permanent collection.[16] The robed figure, with phylactery askew and crown resting on the right knee, likely suggested a Jewish king. The lyre supported an association with David (1 Sam 16:16, 23).[17] However, in this instance David would not be the musician. He

13. Reynolds, *The Vision of Simeon Solomon*, pl. 16.

14. Emmanuel Cooper, "A Vision of Love: Homosexual and Androgynous Themes in Simeon Solomon's Work after 1873," in *Solomon: A Family of Painters* (Geffrye Museum Exhibition Catalogue; London: Inner London Education Authority, 1985), 31–35.

15. Seymour, *The Life and Work of Simeon Solomon*, 48.

16. *Catalogue of the Permanent Collection of Drawings in Pen, Pencil, Charcoal, and Chalk, etc., including Cartoons for Stained Glass* (Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery; Derby: Bemrose & Sons, 1939).

17. Colum Hourihane, *King David in the Index of Christian Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

supports the musician's harp, leans back into the harpist's naked body, and swoons in sensual ecstasy induced possibly by alcohol (note the tipped amphora, its spilled contents flowing under the torpid leopard). In the densely crowded frieze-like background, bare-breasted women dance ecstatically, tambourines in air, beneath folds of tapestry and leafy garland.[18]

In 1964, a member of the Birmingham curatorial staff, Mr. Cooper, told an inquirer that the subject of Solomon's drawing was "Abishag ministering to the aged King David" (1 Kgs 1:1–4). Acknowledging the harpist's (Abishag's) sexual ambiguity, which the museum visitor had also noted, Cooper defended this particular association. "There are signs," he wrote,

> that Solomon filled out Abishag's waist and limbs presumably in an attempt to lessen the sensuous appeal of the narrative. There are also a number of similarities between Abishag and the more obviously female revelers in the background, namely in their flowing hair, bangles and earrings. As for the identity of the male figure, although the harp is obvious, I wonder if you have noticed what looks like a sling entwined around his left arm.[19]

Cooper, or perhaps his predecessor, was of course prompted by the received title *King David*. Yet, the suggestion that this identity might be supported by a "sling" wound round the king's arm, clearly misnamed the phylactery, which Solomon carefully drew on head and arm and marked with the requisite Hebrew letter *shin*. Moreover, in the biblical text to which Cooper alluded, Abishag is not a musician, but *naʿarah betulah*, a "young woman of marriageable age" (KJV, "young virgin"; RSV "young maiden") and *naʿarah yafah*, a beautiful young woman (KJV "fair damsel"; RSV "beautiful girl").

Cooper may have chosen the incident with Abishag because he assumed that the drawing illustrated a moment in the biblical account of David, and in this case, a moment fraught with sexual innuendo. If not David and Bathsheba, an ill-fitting choice, then David and Abishag. For, despite her youthful beauty, which the story emphasizes, and her intimate service to David, the king "did not know her sexually" (KJV,

18. Similar figures appear in Solomon's illustration of Saul's darkening jealousy while watching dancing women celebrate David's military victories: *Eight Scenes from the Story of David and Jonathan* (1856). Image accessible online: http://www.tate.org.uk.

19. Victoria Osborne, email communication with the author, October 4 and 10, 2006. Osborne cites a letter, dated January 14 1964, from a "Mr. Cooper" to an unidentified inquirer.

"knew her not," 1 Kgs 1:4). Thus, Cooper could plausibly see a tousled, but chaste king leaning against a nude Abishag, quite in thrall to her, but little else.[20]

However one judges the plausibility of his suggestions, Cooper provided an unquestionably heterosexual reading of the drawing. In this, he adhered to the presuppositions of the referenced biblical text. Perhaps unwittingly, he also perpetuated the norms of heterodominance that had, nearly a century earlier, helped send Simeon Solomon into decline and obscurity. For more than four centuries, British law had treated male to male sexual relationships as criminal offenses. The provisions of this law, which would not be repealed until 1967, were used to convict Simeon Solomon of indecency in a public lavatory. In 1895, the same legalized social bias transformed Oscar Wilde's public trial into a lurid cautionary tale about the dangers of flaunting established sexual conventions.[21]

Similar popular prejudice excluded Simeon Solomon from the ranks of the socially acceptable. Soon after his death, admiring observer Julia Ellsworth Ford did not mention the artist's arrest and public disgrace, or see any possibly homoerotic elements in his work.[22] Fellow artist and close friend Henry Holiday felt compelled to include Solomon in his own memoirs, but refused to dwell on the "melancholy topic" of his friend's later career, that "morbid growth inexplicable to me, and at variance with all I knew of him when in his right mind."[23] Even as modernism pushed Victorian art into disfavor, it was Solomon's sexual transgression that poisoned critical evaluation. Earle Welby viewed the artist as

20. The biblical tradition may suggest that sexual impotence, rather than abstinence, was the essential point of the story. David's elder son Adonijah took the absence of sexual intercourse as a sign that the aging king could neither provide for the kingdom nor effectively restrain any rivals to the throne (1 Kgs 1:5; 2:13–18). See David Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (JSOTSup 6; Sheffield: JSOT, 1978), 90–91; Danna Nolan Fewell and David Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 162–63; Terence E. Fretheim, *First and Second Kings* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 23; J. Robinson, *The First Book of Kings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 24.

21. Derrick Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (London: Longmans, Green, 1955), 145–52; Montgomery H. Hyde, *The Love that Dared Not Speak its Name: A Candid View of Homosexuality in Britain* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), 134–52, and *Oscar Wilde: A Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1975).

22. Julia Ellsworth Ford, *Simeon Solomon: An Appreciation* (New York: Frederic Fairchild Sherman, 1908).

23. Henry Holiday, *Reminiscences of My Life* (London: Heinemann, 1914).

controversial and decadent, a victim of "disastrous impulses."[24] In the 1930s, Bernard Falk sensationalized Solomon as an unnaturally inclined conniver, and, as late as 1970, Timothy Hilton dismissed him as "dissipated" and obsessed with images of an "unwholesome and sexy gloom."[25]

By then, however, Timothy Hilton was out of step. Massive changes in societal attitudes toward sexuality were underway. Public debates in response to the Kinsey reports signaled the social transformation, as did those who wrote with increasing awareness about the socio-political significance of human sexuality. Eventually a new generation of scholars established politically edged academic fields of study that focused on gender in relation to social class and ethnicity.[26]

In this new context, and running more or less concurrently with the rediscovery of Victoriana, art historians and critics began to treat Simeon Solomon as a subject of renewed interest.[27] In 1968, Lionel Lambourne acknowledged the homoeroticism embedded in some of Simeon Solomon's work and urged others to re-evaluate the importance of this artist in the history of late Victorian art.[28] Others took up the call, among them Simon Reynolds.

Viewing Solomon as a "neglected but highly talented artist," Reynolds sought to place one of the artist's literary works, *A Vision of Love Revealed in Sleep* (1871), into its "correct context in Solomon's life story and into the spectrum of his visual creative work."[29] Inspired in part by an Italian youth to whom the artist attached himself, the mystical "prose

24. T. Earle Welby, *The Victorian Romantics 1850–1870: The Early Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, Burne-Jones, Swindburne, Simeon Solomon and Their Associates* (London: Howe, 1929), 58–60.

25. Bernard Falk, "The Tragedy of Simeon Solomon: Fall from Grace," in *Five Years Dead: A Postscript to "He Laughed in Fleet Street"* (London: Hutchinson), 15–16, 311–31; Timothy Hilton, *Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1970), 202, 209.

26. Roger N. Lancaster and Micaela di Leonardo, eds., *The Gender/Sexuality Reader: Culture, History, Political Economy* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Richard Parker, Regina Maria Barbosa, and Peter Aggleton, eds., *Framing the Sexual Subject: The Politics of Gender, Sexuality and Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

27. Roberto Ferrari, "Simeon Solomon Research Archive" (accessed September 2007), online: http://www.simeonsolomon.org/; Ferrari, "From Sodomite to Queer Icon: Simeon Solomon and the Evolution of Gay Studies," *Art Documentation* 20 (2001): 11–13.

28. Lionel Lambourne, "Abraham Solomon, Painter of Fashion; Simeon Solomon, Decadent Artist," *Jewish Historical Society Transactions* 21 (1968): 274–86.

29. Reynolds, *The Vision of Simeon Solomon*, i.

poem" has Solomon's soul appear as a nude man who escorts the artist through a biblically styled vision journey (cf. Ezek 1–2; 40–48; 2 Esdras; Revelation). At the climactic moment, Solomon beholds what he so ardently seeks: absorption into sensual beauty, youth and love, free of the "cruel veil of flesh… Very Love, the Divine Type of Absolute Beauty, primæval and eternal, compact of the white flame of youth, burning in ineffable perfection." In that blissful moment, Solomon wrote, "[I became] one with the Heart of Love, its inmost, secret flame: my spirit was swallowed up, and I knew no more."[30]

David Playing to King Saul

Among the many visual works that Reynolds chose to help interpret, Solomon's *Vision of Love* was the drawing that two decades earlier the Birmingham Museum had associated with David and Abishag. Now, however, Reynolds, or his source, called the piece *David Playing to King Saul*. Offering no explanation for the changed title and biblical referent, Reynolds simply noted that the drawing showed Pre-Raphaelite influence and introduced an "element of sensuality" into the biblical scene, presumably the incident recounted in 1 Sam 16:23.[31]

David Playing to King Saul was not altogether an implausible title.[32] First, the sensual quality of the image and the sexually ambiguous harpist helped Reynolds relate Solomon's prose poem to the social and personal ambiguities of same-sex male love in Victorian England. Second, when framed in this way, the image, even though depicting nakedness and sensual abandon, is not entirely remote from the biblical accounts of David and Saul. The young David used harp music to calm King Saul's ravings (Hithpael *n-b-ʾ*; 1 Sam 18:10; 19:9; cf. 1 Sam 16:16, 23). The same verbal root characterizes ecstatic agitation associated with nakedness among "prophets" (*nbʾm*, those who "rave" or "prophesy"; 1 Sam 19:20–24). David himself, reports another biblical writer, once danced

30. Ibid., 78–79.

31. Ibid., 11 and pl. 16. Reynolds added that in 1859 Solomon exhibited a painting on the same subject. He probably had in mind an untitled work associated with a biblical quotation: "And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took up his harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him" (1 Sam 16:23; Gambert's French Gallery, *Winter Exhibition of Cabinet Pictures*, 13). The painting is untraced, but it may have been the basis for an 1862 woodblock, *And David Took an Harp* (Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 78).

32. Despite repeated efforts, I have been unable to speak directly with Simon Reynolds about the circumstances surrounding his choice of title.

before God with such abandon that Michal thought him lewdly half-naked (2 Sam 6:14, 20).[33]

Despite these indirect connections with the substance of biblical traditions, Reynolds discussed *David Playing to King Saul* in the context of Solomon's biography, not biblical illustration. While the artist eventually fell away from strict Jewish observance, Reynolds wrote, Solomon did not entirely abandon Hebraic subjects or the "profound understanding of his racial heritage" that was expressed in his delicately refined early drawings and watercolors, including *David Playing to Saul*.[34] Whatever that "racial heritage" might have meant, it did not include the sensual quality of this drawing, which Reynolds thought apposite to the artist's personal exploration of human sexuality and mystical love. Hence, the inclusion of the drawing in the re-issue of Solomon's prose poem on the topic.

Nevertheless, the drawing's title carried a biblical reference, and in this respect the contextualization that Simon Reynolds offered the work suggested that one might view the episode as not only charged with sensuality, but with Solomon's perception of homoerotic possibility in the biblical story. This inference would have been consistent with increasing societal openness to sexuality and gender in the mid-1980s. And it would have fit projects, such as the one taken up by Reynolds, to integrate Simeon Solomon's dissident sexual expression into renewed appreciation for the artist's talents.

What would Simon Reynolds have seen had he walked through this newly opened door? Possibly a bejeweled, young David, plucking his harp, startled eyes fixed on some distant specter, accepting Saul into the crouch of his own body. Saul is absorbed, as though the energy of music and intimate bodily contact has transported him into swooning bliss. Is he given over to homoerotic intimacy, or to the enchantment of music and dance? Or to an alcohol-induced daze like the stupefied leopard?

Perhaps all of these. Indeed, less than ten years later, Simeon Solomon produced portraits of a hauntingly gorgeous, melancholic Bacchus (1867).[35]

33. Simeon Solomon actually depicted this scene in his sketchbook, adopting Michal's point of view, and discretely exposed David's genitalia as he danced. See Simeon Solomon, *Sketchbook (1854–55)* (Ein Harod, Israel: Collection of the Mishkan Le'Omanut Museum); Rickie Berman, ed., *From Prodigy to Outcast: Simeon Solomon—Pre-Raphaelite Artist* (London: Jewish Museum, 2001), 13; Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 70.

34. Reynolds, *The Vision of Simeon Solomon*, 11.

35. Cruise, *Love Revealed*, pl. 91 and 92.

Fig. 2. Simeon Solomon, *Bacchus* (1867)
© Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, 2008.

These images of the Greco-Roman god, whose revels were known in antiquity for their sexual and bibulous abandon, imply that there are no bright lines between human intoxications, whether from wine, eros, beauty, or the gods. That might very well have been Solomon's view. It is surely possible that Solomon found suggestions of homoeroticism in the biblical traditions about Saul and David, just as he had for David and Jonathan (*Scenes from the Life of David* [1859]; *David and Jonathan* [undated]).[36] The much later drawing, *David and Saul* (1896), for one example, is understandable in this light.

36. Gayle Seymour, "Simeon Solomon and the Biblical Construction of Marginal Identity in Victorian England," *Journal of Homosexuality* 33 (June–July 1997): 97–119; Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 73, 70.

Fig. 3. Simeon Solomon, *David and Saul* from Harry E. Jackson, "The Language of Face," *Biblical World* 27 (1906): 440–41. Location of drawing unknown.

The composition is typical of Solomon's later works that feature two heads functioning as types of sensual beauty, dreamy longing and love, as for example, *Until the Day Break* (1869); *Night and Sleep* (undated); *Moon and Sleep* (1894); *My Soul and I* (1894); *Death Awakening Sleep* (1896) and *Christ and Peter* (c. 1896). However, the specificity of the title, *Saul and David*, shifts the balance away from such abstract allegories. Here, Saul is identified by the spear (1 Sam 18:10–11) and shrouded in shadow. He gazes intently downward toward David, clearly the younger of the two. Holding a shepherd's crook and haloed in light, David looks upward, epicene youth to the older man. But do his eyes meet Saul's or lurk in some inner space of yearning? In contrast, Saul's gaze seems less ambiguous. The downward tilt of the king's head and play of shadow and light on his mustache-beard convey melancholic tenderness toward David.[37]

37. *Christ and Peter* (ca. 1896), a watercolor painting, shows similar characteristics of allegorical biblical interpretation. Christ, marked by a halo, looks downward toward Peter who has fixed his eyes toward Christ's brow. Each gaze suggests mutual admiration and tenderness tinged with mystical, perhaps homoerotic, longing. Image accessible online: http://www.simeonsolomon.org.

The image suggests neither the raving, envious Saul of the biblical account nor the brooding king that Solomon portrayed in two works, *Saul Under the Influence of David's Song* (ca. 1857) or *David and Saul* (1862). Rather, the drawing evokes introspective longing and sadness, perhaps tinged with homoerotic attraction. Saul yearns for the youthful, androgynous David, who nonetheless seems distant and unattainable. Perhaps, as André Gide would suggest a few years later, a love that surpasses that of women had already gripped Saul and David (2 Sam 1:26).[38]

Whatever one makes of this drawing, it is noteworthy that the strongly profiled head of David is remarkably similar to that of *Sappho* (1862), a graphite study that Solomon used for his 1864 painting *Sappho and Erinna in a Garden at Mytilene*.

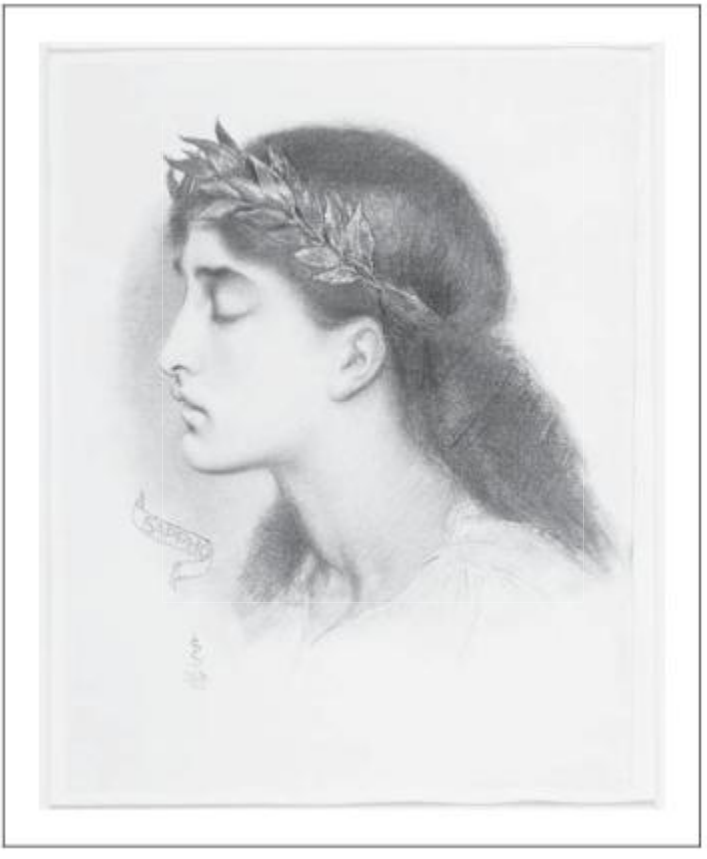

Fig. 4. Simeon Solomon, *Sappho* (1862)
© Tate, 2008.

38. André Gide, "Saul," in *My Theater: Five Plays and an Essay* (trans. J. Mathews; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1896 [1951]), 1–107.

According to Colin Cruise, in much of Solomon's work this poet from the island of Lesbos seems to "represent all same-sex desire and Solomon's own sexual feelings."[39] Or perhaps, in *David and Saul*, she has settled into David's profile, unsettling the space between the two men.

If Simon Reynolds cleared the way for some such sexually charged understanding of Solomon's *David Playing to King Saul*, neither he nor Simeon Solomon, nor the Bible for that matter, spoke directly of such erotic energy passing between Saul and David.[40] Yet, suggesting such homoerotic possibilities, if only by merest mention of a "sensual element," aided Reynolds' attempt to integrate Solomon's homoerotic attachments into a renewed appreciation of the artist's accomplishments. Similar concerns drew Emmanuel Cooper (not the Birmingham curator with the same surname) to Simeon Solomon and this same drawing.

At the time, Cooper was preparing a comprehensive study that would "search out from secrecy, prejudice, distortion and myth the homosexual presence and its wider significance in identifying homosexual expression" in the history of art.[41] Like Reynolds, Cooper considered Simeon Solomon an underappreciated artist whose talents had been obscured by public scandal.[42]

The year before his book appeared in print, Cooper published an essay for the Geffrye Museum's exhibition of works by the Solomon family of painters. Any reappraisal of Simeon Solomon's efforts, Cooper wrote, must begin with the salient facts of his sexual and emotional attraction to other men. From such facts, one may infer what the artist "was seeking

39. Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 112–13.

40. The question of David's relationship with Saul's son, Jonathan, is a different matter altogether. Homoeroticism has haunted the reception of this narrative among artists and writers for quite some time. Saul Olyan recently sought to settle the question as it pertains to the biblical accounts in their original historical context. Language of kinship and love used to describe the intimate friendship between David and Jonathan, he wrote in reference to 1 Sam 18:1–5 and 19:1–7, is fully comprehensible within the culturally defined covenantal obligations between persons and nations. Only in 2 Sam 1:26, Olyan concludes, does one see a suggestion that "a homoerotic and possibly sexual relationship existed between Jonathan and David." See Saul M. Olyan, "'Surpassing the Love of Women': Another Look at 2 Samuel 1:26 and the Relationship of David and Jonathan," in *Authorizing Marriage? Canon, Tradition, and Critique in the Blessing of Same-Sex Unions* (ed. Mark D. Jordan; Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 7–16, 165–70 (16).

41. Emmanuel Cooper, *The Sexual Perspective: Homosexuality and Art in the Last 100 Years in the West* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), xx.

42. Ibid., 65–70.

to express, particularly in his use of the figure of the androgyne."[43] As part of his discussion, Cooper reproduced Solomon's drawing known to the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery as *King David*, but with a title equivalent to the one Reynolds had used: *David Playing Before King Saul*. Cooper argued that the sexually ambiguous harpist foreshadowed Solomon's more mature use of androgynous figures to symbolize "a state of perfection, a particular sexual as well as spiritual identity."[44]

The title did not seem problematic. When he first came upon the work, Cooper recalled, it carried this designation. Reynolds, of course, had already used it, as had Lionel Lambourne in an unpublished biography of Simeon Solomon that Cooper consulted. He remembered some discussion about whether the label was appropriate, but he knew of no other at the time. "Given the subject matter and the way it was painted, it seemed correct," he said.[45]

Like Reynolds, Cooper thought the importance of the drawing lay in its reflection of the artist's dissident values and sexual awareness, not biblical illustration. *David Playing Before Saul* tentatively expressed what later would become Solomon's mature and forceful "rejection of the material values of society, and his perception of himself as a homosexual."[46] These later works, Cooper wrote, carried explicit homoerotic themes. Although Solomon clearly made a statement about same-sex love between women in *Sappho and Erinna* (1864), he never felt as free to depict love between men. For this, he favored

> epicene and androgynous figures, private, intense and introspective [that] describe with a haunting clarity a state where love, free of pain and anguish can freely exist. This state of wholeness, of peace, lay not in material reality of late nineteenth-century Victorian society, but in a vision which could exist only in the imagination.[47]

Solomon never formulated his ideas in quite this way, of course. However, speaking to a new social context, Emmanuel Cooper created a biographical setting in which one could imagine that in *David Playing Before Saul* Simeon Solomon had depicted male to male intimacy so ecstatic and pure that it transcended mere physical love. Indeed, many artists of the Aesthetic Movement, including Solomon, found this

43. Emmanuel Cooper, "A Vision of Love: Homosexual and Androgynous Themes in Simeon Solomon's Work after 1873," in the Geffrye Museum Catalogue, *Solomon: A Family of Painters*, 31.

44. Ibid., 32.

45. Emmanuel Cooper, private communication with the author, April 2007.

46. Cooper, "A Vision of Love," 31.

47. Ibid., 35.

idealism appealing as they negotiated the shoals of late Victorian homophobia.[48] Oscar Wilde put wily eloquence to the matter during his 1895 trial. The love that dares not speak its name, he told the court prosecutor, is "a deep spiritual affection…as pure as it is perfect," not unnatural, but "intellectual." It is a noble affection that passes between an older man, who has intellect, and a younger man, who has the glamorous joy of life before him.[49]

Although Cooper did not pursue the question of biblical interpretation, he implied that in *David Playing Before Saul*, Solomon might have been edging toward finding and naming that love inside the story about David calming King Saul's jealous ravings. If he had followed this interpretation, Cooper might have found a mirror of himself in Simeon Solomon, not in the matter of sexual identity, but insofar as they each pursued a similar hermeneutical project. Solomon, by implication of the drawing's title, re-imagined biblical narrative with a homoerotic presence in it. Cooper re-configured received histories of art in like fashion.[50]

Babylon

Gayle Seymour did not articulate any such possibility in the mid-1980s. At the time, she was preparing her doctoral thesis on Simeon Solomon that would integrate new discoveries into a comprehensive study of the artist and his work. While discussing Solomon's Bible-themed works, Seymour corrected the record on *David* (also known as *David Playing before King Saul*). Without noting the titles used by the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, Simon Reynolds and Emmanuel Cooper, she erased the mistake and in effect asserted that original title, biblical citation and artist's intention should control critical evaluation of the work's meaning.

48. Ibid., 63–85.

49. Transcript of Wilde's First Criminal Trial (cited April 2007), online: http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/ftrials.htm.

50. Others, including professional biblical scholars, were rediscovering dissident sexual presence in the Bible at about the same time; see, for example, Tom Horner, *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 26–39; Greenberg, *The Construction of Homosexuality*, 114; and Gunn, *The Story of King David*, 93. Later, the advent of "queer theory" would provide the basis for Roland Boer, *Knockin' on Heaven's Door: The Bible and Popular Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), to read "straight [biblical] texts and cultural products as queer" and thus "bypass or outsmart the straight Censor and discover a wealth of divergent sexual constructions in any one text" (p. 15).

Assuming that it had been the artist's decision to quote Jer 51:7 in the gallery catalogue, Seymour imagined Solomon as an artist-biblical exegete. *Babylon* (or *Babylon Hath Been a Golden Cup*), she told her readers, must be interpreted in the context of an earlier word from Jeremiah that foretold captivity of the ancient Israelites (Jer 25:11) who, swayed by the Babylonians, would abandon the ethical and religious demands of God (Jer 7:9–10). Specific features in the drawing, such as peacock feathers, passion flowers, adornments worn by the harpist, ecstatic dancers, grape garlands and spilled wine all suggested moral, if not Dionysiac degradation of the captive Jews and their bearded "self-indulgent" king given over to Babylon's seductions. "It is precisely such a break with moral traditions," Seymour concluded, that "Simeon was intending to evoke in this drawing, stressing the hedonistic aspects of a luxurious and sinful life, however, rather than inevitable doom."[51] In passing, she ventured that the drawing may also have had a personal significance for Solomon. "One may wonder," she proffered, "to what extent Simeon was associating his own licentious life in the land of the British Gentiles with the moment of laxity and dissipation in the history of the ancient Jews."[52]

Returning to this drawing nearly two decades later, Seymour still deferred to the primacy of the artist's intent, reiterated her earlier interpretation, and strengthened the connection she saw between "licentious life" and the social markers of Jewishness. Simeon Solomon, she wrote in 2005, created a visual "cautionary tale" out of the prophecies of Jeremiah and images of hedonistic abandon centered on a nude Babylonian Queen Semiramis. With this artifice, Solomon warned his British contemporaries that "Jewish–Gentile interaction might have deleterious consequences—temptation, laxity and religious corruption—potentially corrosive to Jewish identity," which, if not restrained by law, would lead to "national disintegration." Moreover, since depicting nudity, even in a sexually ambiguous way, was unacceptable to traditional Jews, the naked harpist "must be considered in itself emblematic of the relaxing of religious barriers for Jews." That social change, Seymour concluded, aided Solomon's eventual assimilation and thus his own failure to heed the visual warning he so elaborately constructed in *Babylon*.[53]

In this reading, *Babylon* properly understood has little to do with gender, the very issue that had drawn Reynolds and Cooper to the work

51. Seymour, "Life and Work of Simeon Solomon," 48–49, 50.

52. Ibid., 49.

53. Seymour, "Simeon Solomon and the Biblical Construction of Marginal Identity," 17–18.

in the mid-1980s. For Seymour, the image reflects the ethnic component of a triply problematic status: "an individual operating at an intersection of identities as a gay Jewish artist."[54] Other early works, such as *Eight Scenes from the Story of David* (1856) and two drawings, *Saul Under the Influence of David's Song* and *Saul Under the Influence of David's Music* (both ca. 1857), more clearly relate to constructions of sexual identity. In these works, Seymour argued, one sees how Solomon used the "authority of the Bible to explore, camouflage, and ultimately legitimize his own homoerotic yearnings."[55]

Yet, should gender be banished from Simeon Solomon's *Babylon*? First, Seymour's interpretation of the nude harpist seems forced, as though her theory of ethnic identity cannot quite digest this element of the drawing. Second, asserting a privileged ideology of artist's original intent effaces and devalues cultural factors that might very well enhance our understanding of the work and its history of reception. Third, the ancient city of Babylon was already a gendered symbol in Simeon Solomon's time, having functioned since late antiquity as a malleable, feminized image of moral decadence. Thus, Solomon's *Babylon* might well be considered in relation to this persistent cultural history in order to understand more fully the work in both its original and subsequent contexts of reception.

In the Hebrew Bible, poets scorn Babylon as a magnificent, hubristic and fearful affront to true religion. Indeed, Jer 51, the passage originally associated with Solomon's *Babylon*, proclaims hope to exiled Judeans while imagining Babylon's utter destruction as a devastated woman. "Suddenly Babylon has fallen and is shattered; wail for her!… Forsake her, and let each of us go up to our own country… The Lord has brought forth our vindication" (Jer 51:8–10). In the New Testament, Babylon becomes feminized evil, a "whore" (Rev 14:8; 19:2), the "mother of harlots" who opposes goodness-incarnate, the virginal Church "bride of Christ" suffering under Rome's imperial hand (Rev 18:3). As struggles for Christian orthodoxy sorted themselves into Western and Eastern churches, Babylon lived on as a symbol of opposition to the truths of Christianity, even applied by dissidents within, such as sixteenth-century Protestant Reformers who identified the papacy in Rome as the new Babylon.

In the nineteenth century, stimulated by emergent archaeology, tourism, trade, and colonialist expansion, these traditional associations of Babylon were attached to exotic images of Mesopotamia that spread into

54. Ibid., 19.
55. Ibid., 18.

European–American popular culture. Presented melodramatically in printed Bibles, music and mass entertainment, the fall of wicked Babylon warned against moral lapses that, if allowed to persist in modern times, threatened the West's high civilization.[56] Austen Henry Layard's account of uncovering the ruins of ancient Nimrud, which he mistook for Nineveh, brought Assyria into the mix and provided fresh material for sensationalist, popular, and hybrid inventions of an exotic and decadent East.[57] All this, of course, helped justify the West's moves to establish political and economic dominance over the region's inhabitants who, as heirs to an ancient stigma, were seen as a backward, though alluring people.[58]

At one node of these Orientalist constructions was the Babylonian Queen Semiramis. Since classical antiquity this legendary Queen of Babylon had been famous for two things: her male-like deeds as ruler and warrior, and her destructive trespass of the social boundaries set for women. The former were sobriquets of admiration; the latter, badges of condemnation. Her twinned fame and infamy came to classic expression in Boccaccio's *Famous Women*, a moralizing anthology of positive and negative models of female power.[59]

This anxious mix of adulation and condemnation persisted in nineteenth-century representations of the Queen in the visual arts, plays, novels, and opera. Thematically, she was entangled with ideas about sexuality and power, as well as strength, ambition, weakness, tragedy, and beauty. When fierce debates about the place of women in polity raged, Semiramis became both a liberating symbol of what women could

56. Iimre Kiralfy, *The Fall of Babylon: The Most Stupendous Open-Air Exhibition in the World* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Courier Lithograph Co., 1890); John Martin, "The Fall of Babylon" (Engraving), in *Illustrated Family Bible* (London: Sangster & Co., 1860); John Rettig, *The Fall of Babylon: A Grand Historical, Biblical and Spectacular Drama* (Cincinnati: Order of Cincinnatus, 1886); Georget Root, *Belshazzar's Feast, or, The Fall of Babylon: A Sacred Cantata in Ten Scenes* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860).

57. Austin Henry Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains: With an Account of a Visit to the Chaldean Christians of Kurdistan, and the Yezidis, or Devil-Worshippers; and an Inquiry into the Manners and Arts of the Ancient Assyrians* (London: Murray; New York: G. P. Putnam, 1849); Frederick Bohrer, *Orientalism and Visual Culture: Imagining Mesopotamia in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 42–65.

58. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978).

59. Giovanni Boccaccio, *Famous Women* (ed. and trans. V. Brown; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001 [1473]); Julia Asher-Greve, "From 'Semiramis of Babylon' to 'Semiramis of Hammersmith,'" in Holloway, ed., *Orientalism, Assyriology and the Bible*, 330–31.

accomplish, and an exemplum of what some men feared: "gynecocracy, sexual monster, a man-devouring and murdering woman."[60]

Genealogy linked these tangled images of Babylon to representations of Assyria. According to ancient tradition, it was the Queen's distinctly unmanly grandson Sardanapulus who presided over the catastrophic moral decay and physical destruction of Nineveh. Lord Byron put the tale into heroic verse in 1821, which was popularized for the London stage in 1834 and 1853. Inspired by Byron, Eugène Delacroix painted *The Death of Sardanapulus* (1826), a huge painting that in time came to epitomize Orientalist renderings of the "East" as a place of sexually charged, decadent opulence.[61] Later, Charles Calvert transformed Byron's literary elegance into a bombastic spectacle of Eastern wickedness. Near the end of the century, American circus goers reveled in glitzy displays of Nineveh's destruction that condemned enervating female-like behavior and reaffirmed social codes of the manly and masculine.[62]

The theme was already familiar in nineteenth-century taxonomies of Western civilization. Virile civilizations will collapse, French philosopher Proudhon wrote, if they take on woman's innate (and inferior) qualities of pity, charity, grace, and love.[63] Indeed, claimed George Harris for English speakers, women have done "little…for the advancement of learning and science [and] much to encourage and to foster luxury." Yet in the present "age of voluptuousness," men are in danger of becoming "slaves of women" and exchanging a man's "superior wisdom and sagacity" for the "whims and frivolities of the feebler sex."[64]

It seems likely that Simeon Solomon's drawing, *Babylon*, would have evoked something of this malleable cluster of ideas, if not in the artist, then in the viewing public.[65] Babylon as an icon of gendered evil was

60. Asher-Greve, "From 'Semiramis of Babylon' to 'Semiramis of Hammersmith,'" 359.

61. Jack J. Spector, *Delacroix: The Death of Sardanapulus* (New York: Viking, 1974).

62. Burke O. Long, "The Circus," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible and Culture* (ed. J. F. A. Sawyer; Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 365–80.

63. P.-J. Proudhon, *La Pornacratie, ou les Femmes dans les Temps Modernes* (Paris: A. Lacroix, 1875), 38–39.

64. George Harris, *Civilization Considered as a Science, in Relation to Its Essence, Its Elements, and Its End* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1873), 256–57.

65. Roberto Ferrari has kindly informed me that Solomon admired Delacroix, and in 1864 asked if he could accompany William Michael Rossetti to Paris to view a posthumous exhibition of the artist's work. See Roberto Ferrari, "To the Rossettis, From the Solomons: Five Unpublished Letters," *Notes and Queries* 52, no. 1 (2005): 70–75.

alive and well. And now Nineveh, freshly risen from the bleak sands of Mesopotamia, added fresh substance to the typology. The young Solomon could hardly have escaped the feverish excitement over Layard's discoveries that gave impetus to popularizing Byron's *Sardanapulus* and production of an alluring but dangerous "Orient." At the very least, one may presume that when first exhibited in 1859–60, Simeon Solomon's *Babylon* would have been received already entangled with these widely shared constructions of Occident and Orient. It is quite understandable that a critic at the time cautiously noted the drawing's "weird oriental feeling."[66]

In this context, the bearded Jewish figure in thrall to the hedonistic and wicked pleasures of Babylon—seductive music, libidinous and bibulous excess, ecstatic transformation—is one thing. Openly engaging the sexual ambiguity of the harpist (Babylon) is another. For this would have reinforced personal and cultural anxieties about gender confusion, and perhaps even added to the age-old debate about female rulers that in mid-nineteenth-century England had centered on Queen Victoria.[67] Viewed more positively, the sexually ambiguous harpist might have covertly suggested the social possibilities of living, like Queen Victoria, beyond accepted gender definitions of men and women.[68] That idea might have appealed to Solomon and many other artists associated with the Aesthetic Movement.

By taking account of the West's appropriation of Mesopotamia when reconstructing a social and cultural context for Simeon Solomon's *Babylon*, I am suggesting, however provisionally, a way to read this work as a cipher to some of the cultural issues in play at the time the work was created. This approach uncovers a certain continuity with the work's sexualized history of reception, even if that history in part turned on a mistaken title. Correct or not, a title grounds identity, and invites a viewer to construct meaning. Solomon's *Babylon*, whether associated with Mesopotamia or King David, allows one to see the artist, artistic work, and critical interpretation as cultural productions that involve persistent issues of human sexuality negotiated through imagining the Bible and ancient West Asia.

66. Cruise, *Love Revealed*, 77.

67. Asher-Greve, "From 'Semiramis of Babylon' to 'Semiramis of Hammersmith,'" 346–47.

68. Gail T. Houston, "Reading and Writing Victoria: The Conduct Book and Legal Constitution of Female Sovereignty," in *Remaking Queen Victoria* (ed. Margaret Homans and Adrienne Munich; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 159–81.

"David on the Brain": Bertolt Brecht's Projected Play "David"

David Jobling

For about two years, aged 21 to 23, Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956) was preoccupied with the biblical characters David and Absalom, Bathsheba and Uriah, Saul and Jonathan. He projected a play or plays about them, and brought part of the work near completion. He was in discussion with a theatrical producer. During this time he was working also on two major plays which began to establish his reputation, *Baal* and *Drums in the Night*, as well as many other projects which survive intact. But the work on David survives only as fragments and plans.

I have been interested in Brecht since my teenage years. I find in him an extraordinary depth and range. For universality of interest and vision, I think it not too much to compare him to Shakespeare or Goethe. Many regard him as the greatest dramatist of the twentieth century, but he was much more than a dramatist: novelist, essayist, extremely prolific poet, and more. He offers a rich field to the biblical specialist. The standard edition of his works has a separate biblical index running to 34 pages! Asked once in an interview for a magazine what book had influenced him most, he famously replied: "You'll laugh, the Bible."[1]

So, when I was asked to write for a project on Marxism and the Bible, it was to Brecht that I turned,[2] and the invitation to write for the present volume gave me opportunity to carry out what I believe is the first study of the "David" fragments. Though certainly not the work of a mature playwright, they adumbrate Brecht's maturity in interesting ways, and

1. Bertolt Brecht, *Werke: Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, vol. 21 (ed. W. Hecht et al.; Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988–2000), 248. Subsequent references to these collected works in thirty-one volumes will be made in the body of the text by volume and page number (e.g. 21:248).

2. David Jobling, "'Old and New Wisdom Mix Admirably': Bertolt Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*," in *Marxist Feminist Criticism of the Bible* (ed. J. Økland and R. Boer; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008), 70–97.

they are more directly based on the Bible than almost anywhere else in his oeuvre.[3] They run to about 20 pages (10:120–42). There are also a number of journal entries which refer to the David project. This material, together with a memoir by one of Brecht's friends, constitutes everything that we have to go on.

Brecht's David

1. Already as a teenager, Brecht made a precocious assessment of the Bible. The only example he gives for his view is David and Bathsheba:

> I read the Bible…Job and the kings. It is incomparably beautiful, strong, but a wicked book. It is so wicked that one becomes oneself wicked and hard, and knows that life is not unfair but fair, and that that isn't agreeable but horrible. I believe that David himself killed the son of Bathsheba, of whom it is said that God killed him…since David feared God and wanted to calm the people. It is wicked to believe that; but the Bible perhaps believes it too, it is so full of cunning, true as it is. (Journal, Oct 20, 1916; 26:107)

2. In 1919 Brecht worked on a play, *Absalom*, which we know about only from a memoir by Otto Münsterer.[4] By December, it had "reached an almost definitive form." Absalom is clearly the sympathetic character; the dramatic centre of the play is an affair between him and Bathsheba. Münsterer highlights: a lurid-sounding opening scene where David promises "a reckoning with my son Absalom"; "a conversation between Absalom and the trees"; and "a wonderfully tender love scene played out when Bathsheba flees from David to her beloved Absalom at his camp in the field."

This is a young man's play on a young man's theme. The sexually precocious Brecht might well identify with a young man who steals his old father's young girlfriend. He brings together two stories which in the Bible are consecutive but separate: David and Bathsheba, David and Absalom.[5] (Münsterer comments that the biblical story of David,

3. At age 16, Brecht wrote a play which he charmingly entitled "The Bible" (1:7–15). Only a few pages long, it is a variation on the Judith and Holofernes story, set in his home town of Augsburg during the Thirty Years War.

4. Otto Münsterer, *Bert Brecht: Erinnerungen aus den Jahren 1917–22* (Zurich: Verlag der Arche, 1963), 138–39; see also 105.

5. Bringing these two stories together in a play is not original with Brecht. An early author who does it is George Peele, in his *The Love of King David and Fair Bethsabe. With the Tragedie of Absalon. As it Hath Ben Divers Times Plaied on the Stage* (London: Printed by Adam Islip, 1599). Peele, however, more faithful to the

Bathsheba and Uriah could not be accommodated to the Absalom–Bathsheba framework.) The fact that Absalom is "in the field" leads me to suppose that the play covered his revolt, and probably reached its natural conclusion with his death.

From just this time, we have a Brecht prose poem entitled *Absalom Rides Through the Wood* (19:48–49). It tells, in tragic terms, of Absalom going to his death. At one point, he asks the trees for help, in vain; compare Münsterer's "conversation with the trees"! Of course, a tree was the immediate cause of Absalom's death.

3. All the fragments come from the next year, 1920. For the first half of the year, though he must have abandoned the 1919 play, Brecht is on the same terrain—combining the David–Bathsheba and David–Absalom stories. The fragments give three different impressions of this phase:

First, a scene outline:

> *Scene 1.* The royal residence, with a pale sky. David and Absalom. Bathsheba. In the background they are calling for Uriah. David demands Absalom.
>
> *Scene 2.* Absalom by the river in the tavern. Fishermen. Soldiers. Whores. Telling the story of David and Bathsheba, and that she is pregnant.
>
> *Scene 3.* The residence, with a cloud-flecked night sky. Bathsheba and Uriah. Bathsheba enters the bath. Uriah remains. David and Absalom. Meal. Letter. Absalom and Uriah leave, clasping each other. Many soldiers with Absalom. David and Bathsheba remain behind; she is pregnant.
>
> *Scene 4.* Yellow tent. Uriah and Absalom. Uriah alone, in his shirt. (Absalom back with the rebelling soldiers!) Bathsheba and Uriah. Absalom. Uproar. Uriah does not believe in the good (das Gute). He goes to David to beg for his life. He sends Bathsheba ahead. Uriah, marked for death, sits among the enthusiasts (unter den Begeisterten).
>
> *Scene 5.* David's residence. Bathsheba is brought. Uriah comes. He is sent away after the letter. Meanwhile Bathsheba's child is strangled. However, Uriah comes and David flees with him. Bathsheba remains behind, alone, with the child.

Bible than Brecht, juxtaposes the stories rather than really joining them. In a nice closing of the circle, my attention was drawn to Peele by David Gunn's contribution to *my Festschrift* ("The 'Good Commentator': On Joseph Hall, Laurence Sterne, Biblical Narrative, and the Eighteenth-Century Novel," in *Voyages in Uncharted Waters: Essays on the Theory and Practice of Biblical Interpretation in Honor of David Jobling* [ed. W. J. Bergen and A. Siedlecki; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006], 96–109).

Scene 6. Absalom's tent. Unmasking of Uriah.

Scene 7. Vineyard. Death of Absalom. (10:120)

I have broken my head trying to imagine a play of which this could be the outline! But some things we can conclude. This play is certainly not about an affair between Absalom and Bathsheba, but there are other intrigues. Something is going on between Absalom and Uriah, who at one point go off arm in arm. Something is going on between David and Uriah: "Uriah comes and David flees with him." Uriah creates the hardest problems. His role is certainly negative: he "does not believe in the good" (whatever this means), and near the end he is "unmasked." He is "marked for death" as the Bible relates ("the enthusiasts" might be "the valiant men" of 2 Sam 11:16), but he does not die! My best guess is that Brecht boldly fuses the Ammonite war and Absalom's revolt, and has Uriah play a double game, assisting Absalom's revolt (or pretending to), but also helping David escape. In a journal entry, Brecht has an aged David recall how he was ready to surrender to Absalom, and was waiting for him to take over, when "Uriah…came to him, and he didn't succeed in seeing it through, but ran away again."[6] This, surely, is the same as "Uriah comes and David flees with him." Uriah's duplicity is what gets "unmasked" in Absalom's tent. This account makes some sense, at least, of the scene outline, but it leaves Uriah's motives obscure.

The scene outline climaxes in Absalom's death, and this is of a piece with my second impression, which comes mainly from fragments B3–8 (10:125–27). These fragments—in which Absalom (sometimes under the code-name "Koloman," see 10:1019) appears as a tragic hero—show no interest in whatever complicated story lies behind the scene outline. In fact, they make several references to a different, five-act structure, which Brecht must have conceived as a tragedy of Absalom and David. Like all tragic heroes, Absalom contributes to his own downfall. Everything comes easily to him, but he is unable to be satisfied with anything he achieves ("I don't want what I can have: for it is too little"). Perhaps more impressive is David's response. He moves from exasperation at the course his son is taking to grief and despair at his death. Though young Brecht obviously identifies with young Absalom, he shows himself capable of identifying simultaneously with the aging David.

6. Bertolt Brecht, *Bertolt Brecht Diaries 1920–1922* (ed. H. Ramthun; trans. and annotated with an introductory essay by J. Willett; London: Eyre Methuen, 1979), 89 (orig. 26:204). Aside from this edition, none of the other Brecht material I use in this essay exists in translation. I have made translations of it all, which interested readers may see by writing me at david.jobling@usask.ca.

My third impression comes from the only extant complete scene (10:124–25), which I find the most enjoyable part of this phase. It shows David confronting practical problems of kingship. He converses, with a man who might be minister of the interior, about farming, specifically the problem of getting soldiers to settle on the land. A distant foreshadowing of Brecht the Marxist? The manpower problem was, of course, very acute at the time of writing, following World War I. This scene is not emotionally fraught but simply funny. David offers witty solutions to practical problems, before going off to inspect a "Syrian sheep." Not the stuff of tragedy!

4. The second half of 1920 sees a quite new phase—a shift from the mature to the young David—ostensibly inaugurated by a visit Brecht made to the playwright and producer Otto Zarek.[7] Zarek read a scene, "David before Saul," from *his* play "David." This play is extant and rather dreadful, combining simplistic political intrigue with extremely overblown rhetoric.[8] It is a transparent allegory of generational conflict after World War I, expressing a cult of Youth with a capital Y. Saul stands for the generation of mad old men, David for the generation of bright new ones like Zarek. One could wish that a kindlier providence had left us Brecht's "David" entire and Zarek's in fragments.

According to Brecht, he found Zarek's scene so bad that by the following day he had written his own much better version, and within a further two days another scene ("the first scene") to precede it.[9] I believe this is a typical Brechtian myth to advertize how quick and clever he is. There are suggestions that he had been shifting his attention to the young David before the Zarek meeting, and there is clear evidence that he was

7. Ibid., 12 (orig. 26:130). Zarek (1898–1958) was a Jew who emigrated in 1933 and became a noted historian of Hungary. His autobiography, *German Odyssey* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1941), reveals an inveterate name-dropper; for example, he "discovered" Marlene Dietrich and once got embroiled in a revolving door with Hitler. He apparently does not consider Brecht's much of a name to drop, for he barely mentions him, though they were associates for several years.

8. Otto Zarek, *David: Ein dramatisches Gedicht in fünf Akten* (Munich: Georg Müller Verlag, 1921). Bad as it is, this play probably deserves a study for its original solution to the narrative problems of 1 Samuel, which strains, as I have suggested elsewhere (*1 Samuel* [Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998], 232–42), to produce an acceptable or even a comprehensible account of the role played by David. Zarek cuts through all that by making the action turn on a plot by Saul's son Ishbosheth (who is not even a character in 1 Samuel) to become king under Philistine suzerainty by using the war to get rid of Saul, Jonathan and David!

9. Brecht, *Diaries*, 13 (orig. 26:130–31).

still working on these two scenes three weeks after he claimed to have dashed them off.[10]

At any rate, these two scenes are extant and form the bulk of the "David" fragments (they are fragments B9–10; see 10:128–42).[11] Before discussing them, a comment on the intensity of Brecht's preoccupation with "David" at this time. Between August 20 and September 13 we find five journal references to the project. One reveals that "David" loomed as large for him as the *Baal* that would soon make him famous;[12] in another, he concludes a comment on something entirely different with "David on the brain."[13] He makes a number of comments about his intended approach. He wants not to plan out the David play too precisely in advance, but to write it as it comes. He doesn't intend to look for a "point" or serve any particular "idea." If he is true to life, he says, "then, if not understanding, at least soul will result, without my having to add anything." In that case, "there will be not one meaning but a hundred, and I don't need to distort anything."[14] I shall consider "the first scene" (10:132–42) first. David is found conversing with a group of ordinary people. They discuss the possibility of war with the Philistines. The younger participants are contemptuous of the Philistine threat, but the older ones, recalling a premonarchical time when Israel was on a permanent war footing, take the threat seriously. News then comes of an imminent Philistine attack. Jonathan appears, a picture of calm authority. He reassures the panicking crowd, and begins to organize the men for army service.

David is portrayed as a consummate smart-aleck, but one whose smart-alecky opinions are generally right, and who is competent to deal with any practical situation. His comments are tangential and to the point, he turns aside direct questions, but he is the one who really grasps the issues. He keeps all points of view in interplay. Asked what will happen in the war, he says it will be won, which is good, but many will die, which is bad, but they will die as heroes, which is good (10:138–39).

10. Ibid., 18 (orig. 26:136).

11. That these fragments *are* the scenes mentioned in the journal seems unambiguous. B9 is a scene between Saul and David, just like the Zarek scene (Act 2, Scene 17) to which it is a response. B10 reads like the first scene of a play. These two scenes are given in the collected works in the order in which Brecht wrote them, though they would be the other way round in the play.

12. Brecht, *Diaries*, 33 (orig. 26:151).

13. Whence my title. The original is "Den David im Schädel" (26:139). Willett's "Can't get *David* out of my head" (*Diaries*, 21) catches the sense but not the idiomatic terseness.

14. Ibid., 18 (orig. 26:136).

He himself is above these practical matters; he likes to "take it easy" (faul sein; e.g. 10:137). But he is far from passive. He draws his opinions from intense observation, particularly of nature, which teaches many lessons; he offers several fables from nature. For all his lackadaisical front, he is well able to look after himself. When people suggest he should be thrashed, he squares up and asks which three are going to thrash him (10:139). Of course the audience knows that David is soon going to excel in the warfare he despises.

The scene ends hilariously with the arrival of Jesse. He regards David as a liar, a layabout, and a lousy shepherd. Jesse is sarcastic, David cheeky. Jesse takes David off to military duty.

This David is a projection of young Brecht himself. He had an extraordinary winsomeness by which he could control most of those he met, men and women, and he often exploited this power ruthlessly. Part of it was a cleverness with words which has not often been equaled. He understood how this power was linked to his artistic gifts. In fact, however, the period when he could make his world work this way was coming to an end. Already clouds were beginning to gather in the areas of love and work (he couldn't quite manage to get a major play on the stage), and various storms would break on him the following year. He was beginning to see that his life-style could be a threat to, as well as a dynamo for, his work as an artist. One journal entry, written just a couple of weeks after "the first scene," I find particularly revealing. In the course of a self-examination, he says: "All that's needed in order to be happy, to work well, to be able to idle (faul sein zu können), to back oneself up, is just one thing, intensity."[15] Laziness made possible by intensity! This is pure Brecht, trusting his talent to enable him to conquer and be laid back at the same time! It carries over directly to David. David can be simultaneously a layabout, right about everything, and ultra-competent because of the intensity of his observation of people and nature.

I believe that in this scene Brecht rather spoils his David character, as he does some characters in his mature plays,[16] by this projected cleverness. So, I am glad that, in the Saul–David scene (10:128–32), he achieves a different level, one in which he relies much less on this effect. His own comment on this scene is misleadingly flippant: "Saul blurts out his potpourri and traverses all the highs and lows, and through the whole roller-coaster ride David sits there cutting his nails."[17] This is right

15. Ibid., 34 (orig. 26:152).

16. See my comments on Azdak in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* ("Old and New," 80).

17. Brecht, *Diaries*, 13 (orig. 26:130).

enough as regards Saul, but Brecht intuitively makes David into a therapist with a convincing technique. He replies with Freudian brevity to Saul's long rambles. He encourages Saul not to analyze everything but to take what life offers. The longest and most "directive" of these interventions reads: "I don't know what you mean. Can't you lie in the sun or swim or kill enemies? Perhaps that would help" (10:131).

The only place where David employs many words is in a song. Even if the Bible did not suggest the need for a song, Brecht would surely have provided one; the inclusion of songs is the most obvious formal element of all his plays throughout his career. David's song seems to be part of the "therapy." The first verse runs:

> Strong is the bull which never sees
> The sky! He goes around in the sun and
> Tramples the grass down!
> Ha! Laugh in Judah and clap, for
> The bull is strong!
> Strong is the bull, but the grass is stronger
> Which he tramples down. It senses the sky
> And lifts itself up again.
> Ha! Laugh in Judah and clap, for the
> Grass is stronger! (10:129)

To this, Saul does indeed respond non-analytically: he enjoys the verse and claps. But there is a fascinating struggle between mood and meaning. Just before the song, Saul expresses the view that "an animal is no better than a tree," and David's verse clearly picks up this thought.[18] However, when David offers to sing, Saul claims that he never listens to the *words* of a song; it is the *mood* that focuses him (in saying this, he is in denial of his tendency to over-analyze). An ambiguity is created: Does Saul make a "healthy" response to the song's *mood*, or is he just pleased that it agrees with his own *opinion*?

We soon find out. In the second verse, David continues the theme but throws in a couple of *non sequiturs* which maintain the mood but muddy the meaning. Saul can't resist the bait and instantly responds at the level of *meaning*: this verse "makes no sense." In the third verse, David reverts to theme, with no nonsense, and Saul initially responds with laughter and clapping. But he still can't resist analysis, saying of the whole song: "in the middle it is weak." It is as if David were a skilled therapist—with music therapy in his repertoire—nudging Saul along to confront his problems. I would love to have a real therapist analyze the scene!

18. David goes further—grass is *stronger* than a bull, an animal proverbially strong. Brecht's editors see here a debt to Walt Whitman (10:1021).

I am not suggesting a complete *volte-face*, between "the first scene" and this one, in Brecht's handling of David. We are still in the realm of cleverness. David no more wants to be a therapist than a soldier—into both roles he is thrust unwilling (Brecht captures David's discomfort and fear in the presence of a rapidly degenerating paranoiac who is also his king). Once drafted, however, he must needs prove a "natural" in both roles. What I admire about the Saul-David scene is how Brecht's genius transcends his showing-off; he makes the therapy so convincing. One final example. David terminates the "session" with a remark as innocent as can be: "I am glad that my song refreshed you." But when David has gone, Saul turns this sentence every which way, looking for lurking meaning: "What do you say? Your song? What refreshed me? Is it only your song? Are you glad?" Could paranoia be more effectively expressed in so few words? As he speaks, Saul reaches for his spear![19]

5. In his references to work on the young David, I find no indication that Brecht considered combining it with the earlier Absalom–David work in a larger project. It is hard to find thematic links between the two corpora. But, out of the blue, a journal entry a few weeks later begins: "The third part of the play 'David'."[20] This third part was never, so far as we know, put into dramatic form; its shape is merely suggested, in this and two later journal entries. These, however, make it clear what the third part would have looked like, and how it was to be thematically connected to the earlier work on both the young and the mature David.

The three entries imagine David, at the end of his life (or already in *Sheol*) looking back and making a reckoning. This first entry evokes a surreal scene. David is with Saul, Jonathan, and Absalom (or their shades), "in the aquarium all four" (whatever this means, it emphasizes the surreality!). David is put on the defensive about his achievements as king. He speaks of a conduit which he built with great difficulty (Israel having no smiths). Saul laughs and Jonathan asks if it is still working. No, it is derelict, David admits, but that isn't what gets him down. What troubles him is that he missed the right course in life, which was "to take it easy (faul sein), not to want to change anything, to be human." Why didn't he take this course? Because he needed to "protect" the others: heroes need protection. Saul did great things—but David had to pay for them! Absalom needed protection from his self-destructiveness. David had to clean up the mess created by such heroes. He could do so only

19. With lovely technique, Brecht makes this ending echo "the first scene," which ends with David, as he is dragged off to war, fingering his sling-shot.

20. Brecht, *Diaries*, 46 (orig. 26:163).

through politics—the activity he despises. By doing this David lost his integrity, yet somehow regained it at the end.

For the second entry we have to wait six months, until March 1921.[21] David is old and "uproar is growing all round the land" (there are no particulars of this, but Brecht might have perused 2 Sam 20). As in the previous entry, David remembers a much earlier part of his reign, but now the emphasis is different. "He begins to think in numbers again, in issues and necessities, just like years ago." His life was full of practical problems and he met with constant setbacks and opposition; but working with such *real* issues gave him a sense of calm. Even a conduit that fails is a real thing, "visible, meaningful, reparable." He expresses here no sense of having taken the wrong course in life.

In these two entries the aged David remembers his *reign*; in the last, from the next month,[22] he starts by remembering his *youth*. The best thing had been his "laziness" (Faulheit). What thoughts he had then, "devils and angels of thoughts." The boy remembered here is recognizably the David of "the first scene," but this dreamer had to become a calculator. Even after he had become king, however, there was one moment when he nearly made the right choice. For two days during Absalom's revolt, he had just waited for Absalom to come and take over. If then he had simply let things take their course, he might have "become calm." But Uriah persuaded him to flee and he missed the chance to unburden himself of kingship.[23]

Conclusion

Had he completed it, Brecht's "David" might have been magnificent. Certainly the final concept was: a life lived through all its stages and *considered* from the perspective of its end—one thinks of *Peer Gynt*. David and the other characters, the texts of the books of Samuel, got deeply under Brecht's skin. Why did he abandon the project? We don't know; there is simply no further reference to it after the last journal entry.[24] He had lots of irons in the fire in 1921, and completing the project

21. Ibid., 72 (orig. 26:187). No journal is extant between September 26, 1920 and February 9, 1921, so Brecht may have continued to have "David on the brain" during this period without our having evidence of it.

22. Ibid., 88–89 (orig. 26:204).

23. I used this reference above, to unravel the "scene outline." If this link is correct, it indicates how clearly Brecht had his earlier "David" work in mind as he conceived the final project.

24. In 1937, Brecht began an opera called "Goliath" (10:753–89), but David has only a small role and there is no use of the old "David" material.

would have required much work. Though his concept of the whole is very convincing, much of what he had written earlier would have been hard to adapt to this concept. But I wonder if the reality is not simply that "David" had done what he could for Brecht, helped him mature, as David had had to mature, and enabled him to move on to other things.

Brecht's "David" provides a wonderful example of how the Bible, for an artist in the Western tradition, is *both* an elephant in the room, which he/she must come to some sort of terms with, *and* an artistic world to inhabit: immense, comprehensive, inviting being viewed in an endless variety of ways (a hundred meanings rather than one, as Brecht says). "David" was the central event in his coming to terms with the elephant, and it prepares us for the fundamental importance of the Bible in his life's work, expressed in many ways more or less overt.[25]

The Brecht of 1919–21 had so many creative ideas and was subject to so many impulses; and all the while he had "David on the brain." This one part of the Bible offered him, perhaps, the most comprehensive framework for all he was experiencing and planning. "Youth" was likely the immediate impulse: the exciting possibility of an affair between Bathsheba and Absalom; Absalom the tragically doomed young man; young David, who could produce endless clever talk but also cope with practical problems. Many of us have early experience of the Bible pulling us in by fulfilling our wishes. Once pulled in, however, we experience aspects of the Bible that are less welcome. Even as a teenager (laid up for several weeks by a heart condition) Brecht had experienced a book "so evil that one becomes oneself evil" just by reading it.[26] Texts of terror! But this experience made him *keep* reading, not stop reading. And this, perhaps, is why he got past his facile identification with biblical young men. He went deeper in and came to terms with the Bible at another level. He saw that the Bible can speak of youth only by speaking also of age. No Absalom without David, no young David without Saul. Few things about the David fragments impress me as much as the way young Brecht intuits the problems of mature adulthood and of old age. His final concept for "David" indicates that he accepted one of the great gifts that the Jewish Bible—not the New Testament—has to offer: the depiction of a whole life lived.

The fragments include adumbrations of what in the mature Brecht will appear consciously as Marxist themes. King David finds salvation in what is *material*. It is so refreshing to move from all the *Sorrows of*

25. In "Old and New," I have given an extensive account of how the Bible functions in *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

26. 26:107; see the full quote above.

Young Werther stuff around Absalom to the scene about agricultural manpower and the Syrian sheep! The same note is struck in the late journal entry about the "consoling" *reality* of a broken conduit. Marxism is similarly on the horizon in "the first scene," where an old man compares monarchy unfavorably with the premonarchical order: morale was higher when war was a collective responsibility. Such issues begin quietly to subvert the more conventionally "dramatic" features, preparing us for the later Brechtian revolution in theater.

David Gunn's major turn in recent years has been to reception history, and I am happy to honor him with a contribution to that field. After his triumphant treatment of the reception of Judges,[27] he is working on the books of Samuel for the same series. Perhaps Brecht's "David" may merit a few lines.

27. David M. Gunn, *Judges through the Centuries* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

A King Fit for a Child: The David Story in Modern Children's Bibles

J. Cheryl Exum

Is the Bible an unsuitable book for children?[1] How does one tell Bible stories in a manner appropriate for young readers? What does one do with the God-sanctioned battles and punishments, the command to sacrifice Isaac, the flood, the plagues, the conquest? There are many collections of Bible stories for children. They all make decisions about how to present "unsavory" material, and their solutions range from simple omission to tasteful reshaping. As a way of drawing together two areas in which David Gunn has made significant contributions—the interpretation of the story of King David (1978) and the reception history of the Bible (2005)—I consider here how selected modern children's Bible stories retell the story of David, one of the finest examples of ancient Hebrew storytelling, whose protagonist is one of the Bible's most difficult characters to fathom. In the interest of space I focus on two questions: (1) do retellings give us a sense of the complexity of David's character and the ambiguity of his motives during his spectacular rise from shepherd boy to king over Israel?, and (2) how do these retellings deal with "unsuitable material," difficult or otherwise problematic moments—"hard places" as Ruth Bottigheimer calls them, borrowing the phrase from seventeenth-century English Puritans (1996, xii)—in particular, David's crimes of adultery and murder and the dire misfortunes that befall his house as punishment.

From his anointing by Samuel and his victory over Goliath (the story of the boy of faith who overcomes the older, bigger, and stronger bully is a favorite subject for children's Bibles)[2] to his popularity among the

1. See Pyper 2005, 135–53, for provocative reflections on this question.

2. The younger David appears, especially through illustrations but also by means of the retelling, the more an inspiration he is to young readers. All the children's Bibles surveyed here include the story of David and Goliath. Bach and I (1989) omit it precisely because it is so often retold.

people that arouses Saul's jealousy, his friendship with Saul's son Jonathan and marriage to Saul's daughter Michal, to his adventures as a renegade who easily evades Saul's attempts to kill him (when twice he has the opportunity to kill Saul but spares the life), David appears to lead a charmed life as he rises to the throne that once belonged to Saul. The story of David's rise in the Bible (1 Sam 16–2 Sam 5) is relatively uncomplicated, though not without ambiguity.[3] Is David a pious young man who trusts in God and is loyal to Saul, with no designs on Saul's kingdom? Or is he cool and calculating, manipulating others and presenting himself publicly in the best possible light, biding his time and playing his cards right until the kingdom is his? We cannot decide because, in contrast to the more intimate portrayal of David we get in the story of his reign (2 Sam 6–1 Kgs 2), David in the story of his rise is very much a public persona, and we cannot be sure what feelings or intentions lie behind his words. Do retellings for young readers capture anything of this ambiguity? For the most part, no.

Again for reasons of space, I confine my comments to eight examples, aimed at young readers from ages 5 or 6 to 14 (and older, since adults, usually parents, may enjoy them too). To give a bit of an international flavor, one book is in Dutch, one in German, and another is a translation from Spanish into English.[4] Five are representative of what one can easily find in libraries and bookstores.[5] They are children's *Bibles*, not

3. See Gunn 1978, 95–97; Exum 1992, 120–26, 138. There are setbacks, but with God's help David overcomes them; for example, Saul's jealousy forces him to flee the court (1 Sam 19–20); his reputation with his own people is at risk when he joins the Philistines (1 Sam 27–29).

4. I have not included books that present themselves as "my first Bible stories." The Dutch collection specifies ages 7–12, and informs the reader (one assumes the explanatory notes are for parents) that some stories are better for 7 year olds, others for 10 to 12 year olds (Offringa 1994, 310); the back cover adds that older children and adults will also find these retellings fascinating. The German collection contains different stories for different age groups between 6 and 10 and older; the David story is intended for ages 10 and over. The publisher's website gives ages 10–14 for *The Bible: A People Listen to God* (http://www.litpress.org/Detail.aspx?ISBN=0814625096; accessed 20 January 2008). The wrap-around covers to *Moses' Ark* and *Miriam's Well* describe them as books for all ages. The back cover to *Candle Bible Stories for Every Day* stresses the value of regular family Bible reading: "Children will be encouraged to spend time together with the family, reading a new story each day."

5. I have not used any of the many children's Bibles that simply put the biblical text into a simplified English version. I have not found the diversity Landy finds in retellings of the story of Noah's ark (2007); I suspect that the mythical quality of the Noah story, the grand canvas against which it can be presented, lends itself more

just selections from the Bible. Though some are more comprehensive than others, they all aim to give a reasonable overview of the entire biblical "story," which for them means the Old and New Testaments, and which they retell in a straightforward and quasi-authoritative way. As they tell it, the story of David's rise is unproblematic: he is chosen by God, he trusts in God, he is loyal to Saul, even to the extent of refusing to raise his hand against "the Lord's anointed" when he has the chance,[6] and God supports him at every point along the way. This picture is not unexpected, since the biblical account itself is so apparently positive.

Candle Bible Stories for Every Day is the most ambitious. It divides the Bible into 29 "stories" of 365 sections, providing, as the title indicates, a "journey through the Bible in 365 exciting days!"[7] Twenty-seven days are devoted to "The Story of David," as compared to four for "The Story of Saul," although Saul appears, of course, in the story of David. Only "The Story of Moses," with 51 sections, "The Story of the Apostles," with 28, and, not surprisingly, "The Story of Jesus," with 73 sections, are longer.[8] Most of the story of David (20 days) deals with his rise, but because sections average only about 250 words each, we get only the bare bones of the story. Although *Candle*'s David is a one-dimensional character, lacking in depth and not nearly so interesting, or realistic, as the biblical David, and he acquires the throne with comparative ease, we do hear of one incident where David does something wrong: he tells a lie. It takes place when David is fleeing from Saul. He stops at Nob to ask for provisions, but he lies to Ahimelech the priest, telling him that he is on a secret mission for Saul. When Saul hears that Ahimelech has helped the fugitive David, he has the priests of Nob and Ahimelech's relatives and livestock killed (the extent of killing in the

readily to imaginative retellings than the story of King David, whom retellings seek to present as something of a historical figure whose story they feel obliged to recount realistically and "faithfully."

6. The stories of David sparing Saul's life in 1 Sam 24 and 26 are especially popular. Rock (2005) is the only one of my examples who does not include it. Hastings (2003, 123) and Steinkühler (2005b, 162) retell 1 Sam 24; Bach and Exum (1989, 127–31) retell 1 Sam 26; *Candle* (2006, 178, 181–82), Offringa (1994, 112–13, 116–17), Baró (1998, 107, 109) retell both versions. No one suggests that David may have other motives, such as appearing loyal to Saul in order to look better in the eyes of supporters of the house of Saul, or refusing to kill the Lord's anointed to set a precedent for others to follow when he is king, though Bach and I allude to this (1989, 141–42; see below).

7. From the back cover. There is no introduction, as though none were needed.

8. "The Story of Judah" also has 27 sections, beginning with 1 Kgs 14–15; 2 Chr 15–16 and continuing through 2 Kgs 25; Jer 40–43.

Bible is even greater; see 1 Sam 21). When David learns of the "terrible trouble" caused by his "selfish lie," he is "heartbroken" and "sorry he had not trusted God to take care of him instead of lying to protect himself" (*Candle* 2006, 178). The terse and straightforward storytelling makes David's deception of Ahimelech sound like a child's innocent lie, and, despite words like "heartbroken" and "sorry," there is a discomfiting absence of feeling in the story.[9] But there is a lesson to be drawn about the importance of trusting in God, and, of course, the harmful consequences of telling a lie.

No information is given about the authorship of the retellings in *Candle Bible Stories*. Perhaps the absence of an author's name is a way of giving these stories an aura of biblical authority, as if they came directly from the Bible itself. Two other selections in my survey do not put the author's name on the front cover or spine, for the same reason I suspect: *Wie Feuer und Wind* [*Like Fire and Wind*] and *The Bible: A People Listen to God*. The latter has simply *The Bible* on the spine and nothing about the author on the back cover, and, as if to confirm my suspicion, the first words of the Introduction are, "Let's talk about this book that you have in your hands, the Bible."

The Lion Illustrated Bible for Children, retold by Lois Rock and illustrated by Christina Balit, is, like Candle Books, an imprint of Lion Hudson,[10] and it too speaks of a journey: the Bible stories are "companions for the journey of life." In an Introduction, Rock describes the Bible as a seamless, ongoing story, culminating in Jesus, "one great story" in which humanity is good and bad, while God is a god "of unfailing forgiveness and everlasting love"—hardly a very apt description of God in the story of David. Rock retells much less of the story of David's rise than *Candle Bible Stories*, and relates only two episodes in any detail,

9. Throughout "The Story of David," David displays only a few simple emotions: he says goodbye to Jonathan "sadly" (*Candle* 2006, 175); he is "sorry" when he hears of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (185), "angry" at Nabal's insult and "touched" by Abigail's apology (180–81), "angry" at the assassins of Ishbosheth (187) and at Absalom for killing Amnon (194), "terribly angry" at the selfishness of the rich man in Nathan's parable (192) "sorry" he sinned against God in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah (193), "sad" when Absalom is killed (196), "happy" when the ark of the covenant is brought of Jerusalem (188), and he "loved" Jonathan and Absalom (190, 196).

10. It was first published in 2001 under the title, *The Lion Bible: Everlasting Stories*. Lion Hudson is "the UK's largest independent publisher of books inspired by the Christian faith and its values for a worldwide readership" (http://www.lionhudson.com/).

David's victory over Goliath and the story of David and Bathsheba.[11] How David becomes king in Saul's stead is passed over briefly, but, in her story of "David the King," Rock mentions "seven years of intrigue, murder, and treachery" before the throne becomes David's. "David," she continues, "was clever and cunning…," but any doubts the reader might form about David's worthiness are dispelled in the same sentence, which continues, "and, through the struggle, God was with him." Hostilities between the two rival houses (to which the Bible devotes nine chapters)[12] are simply resolved when "the people of Israel…recognized that God had chosen [David] to be king" (2005, 108–9).

In *The Children's Illustrated Bible*, retold by Selina Hastings and illustrated by Eric Thomas and Amy Burch, most of the story of David is devoted to his rise, told briefly, in an easy to follow story form. Events move quickly, without incident, as David becomes king. This is an attractive collection, with considerable visual interest on the page; in addition to copious illustrations, there are photographs of people, places, and artifacts.[13] It also comes with credentials on its sleeve that ally scholarly authority with biblical authority: the back cover boasts,

11. With such brief sketches, it is hard to show much about character and motivation. For example, when Samuel comes to anoint one of Jesse's sons as the future king, and David, the youngest, is sent for, he comes running, "his eyes laughing." Later, when David visits the Israelite camp, bringing food to his brothers, he is "whistling a merry song." Thus we see him as an untroubled, happy youth. When he hears Goliath's challenge, he grins. "'I'll go for it,' he said. 'With God on my side, how can I lose?'" (*Candle* 2006, 103–4). His confidence in God, illustrated in the Goliath episode, appears to be his main character trait. When he becomes an outlaw, fleeing from Saul, in spite of occasional bouts of despair, "in his heart he believed God would keep him safe always" (106). This description of David's feelings is followed immediately by Ps 23, in the NRSV translation, a psalm well known and widely cherished as a psalm of assurance, and the illustration shows David playing the harp, apparently singing, or even composing, this psalm.

12. See 2 Sam 2–4, 6, 9, 16, 19–21.

13. For example, for "David and Bathsheba" (Hastings 2003, 130–31; discussed below) on one page we see a seated King David in the foreground, watching Bathsheba bathing in a pool in a luxurious courtyard, attended by a servant. On the side of the page is a picture of a clay figure of a woman bathing, with a caption that tells us that "After washing, Bathsheba would have rubbed scented oil into her skin." On the facing page, there is an illustration of Uriah, lying dead on the battlefield, with other soldiers dead or fighting in the background. On the side of the page is a photograph, with explanatory caption, of a young girl holding a lamb, beneath that the text of 2 Sam 12:3 (KJV), and, beneath that, an illustration of a poor man feeding his ewe lamb with his own food. Characters are identified by arrows pointing to them, taking all the fun out of relating illustrations to the story for children.

"Prepared in full consultation with education experts, scholars and religious advisers."[14]

Baukje Offringa, in *Op weg: verhalen uit de bijbel voor kinderen* [*On the Way: Stories from the Bible for Children*], with illustrations by Lika Tov, leaves out material that might confuse or disturb children, a decision based on her pedagogical experience with children and their suggestions.[15] Omitting potentially problematic material has a small effect on her account of David's rise, to which she devotes most of her retelling of the David story, but it considerably affects her version of the Bathsheba–Uriah affair and its aftermath, as we shall see below.[16]

The most engaging of these traditional types of retelling, in my view, is *The Bible: A People Listen to God*, a beautifully produced book, translated from the Spanish text of Joan Baró i Cerqueda, with an introduction and notes by Ignasi Ricart and illustrations by Maria Rius. The illustrations draw readers into the stories; they have a cartoon-like quality and characters look somewhat childlike, making these illustrations more appealing than the more realistic ones in *Candle Bible Stories* and *The Children's Illustrated Bible*.[17] Careful attention is given to the plot and there are lots of episodes, with ten stories devoted to David's rise, two to the story of David and Bathsheba, and eight to later events, making this the most comprehensive version of the David story in the conventional children's Bibles surveyed here.[18] The Introduction describes the Bible as

14. It lists as its Educational Consultant Geoffrey Marshall-Taylor, Executive Producer, BBC Education, responsible for religious radio programmes for schools. Historical consultants were Jonathan Tubb (OT) and Carole Mendleson (NT), both of the Western Asiatic Department, British Museum; religious consultants were Mary Evans, London Bible College, and Jenny Nemko, writer and broadcaster for the BBC (OT) and Stephen Motyer, London Bible College, Bernadette Chapman and Philip Walshe, both at St Mary's College, Twickenham (NT).

15. Among the stories she leaves out as potentially confusing or disturbing are the near sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22), which, she explains, might lead some children to wonder whether or not their parents might be as obedient as Abraham was, if commanded by God to sacrifice them, and the story of Jesus walking on water (Mark 6:45–52), which is better reserved for those who have a more developed understanding of the Bible's symbolic language. Children could get the wrong impression of God as "de straffende God" [the punishing God], or of Jesus as "een tovenaar die alles kan" [a magician who can do everything] (Offringa 1994, 309).

16. For example, in retelling 1 Sam 25 from the story of David's rise, she omits Nabal's death, which the Bible attributes to God ("the Lord smote Nabal and he died," v. 38) and does not therefore report that David took Abigail as a wife.

17. Christina Balit's illustrations to Rock's retellings are more stylized and angular, and Lika Tov's illustrations to *Op weg* are lively and appealing.

18. Its scope is matched only by Steinkühler; see below.

"the book of the Word of God," with Jesus as "the culminating point," and there is a curious note inserted into the story of David's anointing by Samuel, explaining the meaning of the term "messiah" and identifying Jesus as the awaited messiah (Baró 1998, 103). In the story itself, however, Baró follows the plot of the story of David closely, resolving many of its ambiguous details, and recounts in a matter-of-fact but fresh way how a guileless, unsullied David rises effortlessly to the throne.

That David, in the account of his rise, has designs on Saul's kingdom, or that he may be involved in the deaths of members of Saul's house who stood in his way, or that he manages his public persona in a way to gain popular support as Saul's obvious successor—all these possibilities are ignored in these traditional retellings. *Wie Feuer und Wind: Das Alte Testament Kindern erzählt* [*Like Fire and Wind: The Old Testament Told for Children*] by Martina Steinkühler, in contrast to these, and other similar collections I consulted in English, allows us to see something of the political intrigue that makes the biblical account so riveting, and offers young readers more of an opportunity to consider for themselves possible explanations for David's conduct.[19]

These creatively retold tales from the Old Testament, accompanied by citations from the biblical text and illustrated with modern photographs of Middle Eastern scenes, have a clear religious agenda, to bring children closer to God, the God of Jesus Christ, signs of whom can be found in the Old Testament (there is a companion volume for the New Testament). Steinkühler devotes some 59 pages to the story of David, using various storytelling techniques to bring the stories to life. How David became king, for example, is told by the prophet Samuel, who is disturbed when David becomes a leader of a band of malcontents but who dies at peace, knowing that a man who respects life will be king (the last story he tells is of David sparing Saul's life, 1 Sam 24; Steinkühler 2005, 161–62). Then Jonathan's son Mefi-Boschet takes up the story. He wonders what kind of man, what kind of king, David is, but his aunt Michal assures him that David is good and urges him to have faith in God's anointed. Mefi-Boschet comes to this conclusion himself, but along the way he reports that many people believe that David wants the throne and would use any means to get it. There are rumors that David was responsible for the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, and possibly also Abner and Ish-Boschet.

19. I suspect that Steinkühler has been influenced by Stefan Heym's remarkable 1972 novel; on Heym's and other modern novels based on the story, see Müllner 1998 and O'Kane 1998, 336–47.

Using characters as narrators who also report the views of yet other characters enables Steinkühler to introduce a variety of perspectives on events, though she is critical of human actions only, not God's (God, her characters assure us, brings weal but not woe and is with us when bad things happen). Steinkühler makes the David story interesting, building suspense as events unfold and characters develop in relation to one another and over time. She succeeds in giving her readers a sense of the ambiguous circumstances in which David rises to power missing in other retellings, though, in the end, she dispels any doubts she may have raised about David's designs on the throne, as David convinces both Samuel and Mefi-Boschet of his good intentions. Her David, like everyone else's, appears in a positive light, although he is not perfect. A youngster observes of him that he could not always do the right thing, but he earnestly tried (Steinkühler 2005, 163); God tells Mefi-Boschet (so Mefi-Boschet tells us) that he has chosen David to be king, and that David is good, but he is, after all, only a man (180); and David excuses himself with the same sentiment—a king is only a man (182, 190).

My final examples, *Moses' Ark: Stories from the Bible* and *Miriam's Well: Stories about Women in the Bible*, by Alice Bach and J. Cheryl Exum, illustrated by Leo and Diane Dillon, unlike the others, are not children's Bibles. Although they retell only a selection of stories, I include them because they are the only children's Bible stories I know of that are trade books written by biblical scholars, and they allow me, as their co-author, to comment on a topic I generally avoid when writing about the Bible: the author's intention.[20] They are also the only collections sampled here that are not intended as religious instruction, "to bring children closer to God," as Steinkühler puts it (2005, 7).

For us, the Bible is the Hebrew Bible, though of course it is the Bible for Christians too. We devote one story out of thirteen in *Moses' Ark* to events surrounding David's rise in 1 Sam 26–2 Sam 1, and we tell it through dialogue so that, as in the biblical account, the reader has only David's words, not any judgment on our part, from which to form an opinion about his motives. In our notes at the end of our story, "David—From Outcast to King" (Bach and Exum 1989, 126–42), we point out, "Whether David is genuine in his protestations of loyalty to Saul or just biding his time is open to question" (141–42). David's rise in our

20. In particular, I would draw attention to the fact that authors may write books with not only their own agendas in mind but also to fulfill the expectations, or even explicit commissions, of publishers and the perceived expectations of envisioned audiences (publishers, like authors, want to sell books), something critics often forget.

retelling, as in the Bible, is easy and assured, but, in addition to showing David's merits, we include incidents that reveal a less than ideal picture of him, such as his deception of the Philistine ruler Achish in 1 Sam 27 (when he tells Achish that the spoils he brings back to him are from raids against Judah and other allies of Israel, when actually he has raided surrounding villages and killed all the people so that no one could disclose his treachery to Achish) and the discord between David and his followers when they discover that their city of Ziklag has been pillaged and burned by the Amalekites (1 Sam 30).

In *Miriam's Well* we retell two stories from the account of David's rise: 1 Sam 19, where Michal saves David's life, and 1 Sam 25, where David is prevented by Abigail from incurring bloodguilt by killing her husband Nabal and the men of his household.[21] Because these stories are about biblical women, David is more of a minor character. We portray him favorably, although, in our notes to "Michal Saves David's Life," we are critical of David's treatment of Michal in 2 Sam 6—a marked contrast to other retellings, which make Michal seem petulant, snobbish, and immature in criticizing David for dancing before the ark (*Candle* 2006, 188; Hastings 2003, 129; Offringa 1994, 118–19; Baró 1998, 111; Steinkühler 2005, 182, though, to illustrate her complex use of voice, as something Ziba tells Mefi-Boschet he has heard).

Children are spared unpleasant events by Offringa, whereas, at the other end of the spectrum, *Candle Bible Stories* is full of gruesome tales presented dispassionately as a matter of course. Since the David story is full of violence (even Offringa retells David killing Goliath, not merely teaching him a lesson), it is difficult for retellings to remove it completely without distorting the narrative. There are numerous battles in which soldiers on both sides are killed. Murders and assassinations claim members of both royal houses, Saul's and David's, with David's relations often dispatched by other members of his family. Thus we hear of the slaughter of the priests of Nob (*Candle* 2006, 177–78; Baró 1998, 106; Steinkühler 2005, 161), Saul's suicide (*Candle* 2006, 185; Hastings 2003, 127; Baró 1998, 110; Bach and Exum 1989, 123 notes), Absalom's death at Joab's hands, as he hangs helplessly in the tree (*Candle* 2006, 195; Hastings 2003, 133; Baró 1998, 117; Steinkühler 2005, 197), the mistreatment of the bodies of Saul and his sons by the Philistines, and the death of Uzzah for the simple act of touching the ark to steady it (*Candle* 2006, 185, 187).

21. "Michal Saves David's Life" and "Abigail, the Wife More Precious than Jewels" in Bach and Exum 1991, 80–87, 88–96, respectively.

Retellings of the story of David and Bathsheba suggest that sex is considered more problematic than violence in Bibles for young readers.[22] Authors often rely on brevity and omission of detail and circumlocution to recount, with the minimum of aggravation, a taut and dramatic story in which lustful desire leads to adultery, which results in pregnancy, which leads to murder in an effort to conceal the crime. A complicated story, and not a pretty picture of David. A simple solution to the problems retelling the story poses is to leave it out, which is what Bach and I do. Because we retold only a limited selection of Bible stories, we felt no obligation to provide an overview of the whole David story. Omission was not a decision we debated. The story in 2 Sam 11–12, if told in its complexity, and with the attention Bathsheba and Uriah deserve, would not, we agreed, be suitable for our audience. More important, such a version would not be what most parents would be looking for in a collection of Bible stories for young readers, and we wanted to sell books.

Omission is not a luxury children's Bibles can so easily allow themselves.[23] Four of my examples—*Candle Bible Stories*, and the retellings of Rock, Hastings, and Baró—begin the story of David and Bathsheba with David in Jerusalem, while his army is away at war, alluding, at least, to the more openly critical attitude the Bible takes toward King David, who, at the time of year "when kings go forth to battle," remains at home napping and strolling at leisure on his palace roof, while his army, under Joab's command, does the fighting. By beginning the tale with David simply standing on the roof looking around, Offringa makes his looking seem more innocent. Indeed, Bathsheba is not all he sees; he first notices children playing (1994, 120). Steinkühler's changes are more radical. She has Mefi-Boschet tell the story, and through his eyes we see what David sees. Mefi-Boschet observes David gazing at Bathsheba and realizes that David desires her; however, he feels sure that David will not break the sixth commandment by committing adultery (2005, 187).

Is Bathsheba free to refuse the king? The Bible reports that "David sent messengers and took her," which sounds like aggression, and that "she came to him," which is not what one would expect if resistance were involved. Retellings in children's Bibles are similarly terse, but not quite so ambiguous:

22. Bottigheimer observes that two stories dealing with sexuality figure frequently in children's Bibles, Joseph and Potiphar's wife and David and Bathsheba (1996, 116); see her discussion of the latter, 127–32.

23. Omission was, however, a popular solution in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and continued into the twentieth; see Bottigheimer 1996, 132.

> David sent for her and slept with her as if she were his wife. (*Candle* 2006, 191)
>
> He sent orders that Bathsheba be brought to him, and he made love to her. (Rock 2005, 110)
>
> …he gave orders for Bathsheba to be brought before him. (Hastings 2003, 130)
>
> David ordered her to be brought before him and they had sexual relations. (Baró 1998, 112)
>
> David laat haar bij zich komen [David sent for her]… (Offringa 1994, 121)

These versions, like the biblical account, do not address the issue of force versus consent, and thus shed no light on Bathsheba's point of view.[24] Only one author, Steinkühler, raises the possibility that Bathsheba desired the king's attentions,[25] and she alone shows complicity on Bathsheba's part. Mefi-Boschet sees Bathsheba sneaking away from a rendezvous with David. She asks him to keep her secret, explaining this is the only time she has been with David and she won't do it again. Mefi-Boschet sees David write a letter, but knows nothing of its contents until after David and Bathsheba are married. But when Bathsheba's husband Uriah is killed in battle, Mefi-Boschet wonders if David had anything to do with it (2005, 188). Steinkühler replaces the Bible's unflattering portrayal of David with a more romantic version: David has her husband killed and marries Bathsheba for love, not to conceal his adultery.

Candle Bible Stories and Baró make no attempt to excuse David for sleeping with Bathsheba "as if she were his wife," as the former circumspectly puts it, and, when he learns of the pregnancy, trying to pass the baby off as Uriah's. Rock, in contrast, tries to account for, or possibly excuse to some extent, David's desire by explaining that "David was

24. For discussion of the biblical narrator's denial of subjectivity to Bathsheba, see Exum 1993, 172–74 et passim.

25. Steinkühler presents the idea that Bathsheba tried to get David's attention as a rumor, which is neither confirmed nor denied, challenging her readers to draw their own conclusions (2005, 202). Some biblical scholars raise this possibility; for example, Hertzberg 1964, 309; Nicol 1988: 360; 1997. It is possible that one could draw this conclusion from illustrations to Offringa's and Hastings's stories, which show David looking down upon the bathing Bathsheba, but not so likely, I think, for in neither case is Bathsheba aware that she is being watched (she does not return his gaze), and David is in the foreground, with Bathsheba in the distance (unlike many paintings of the scene in art, which focus attention on, and often blame, Bathsheba for allowing herself to be seen; see Exum 1996, 30–43; cf. Gunn 1996, 77–88).

fond of women" and had several wives. She focuses attention on David's abuse of power in taking Bathsheba: "But I am king, thought David. So everything in the kingdom is mine if I want it." In Rock's retelling, as in the biblical story, there is no intimation that David is in love with Bathsheba or that he wants to marry her. Upon learning that Bathsheba is pregnant, he thinks, "How inconvenient," and he is uneasy "[d]espite his arrogance."[26]

David's solution to his predicament, getting Uriah to have sex with Bathsheba so that it would appear that the child is his, is conventionally described in retellings through roundabout language or euphemisms like the Bible's "go down to your house." Baró, though, is refreshingly forthright and concise:

> David wanted him to spend the night with his wife so that the baby she was expecting could be attributed to Uriah and not to him. He tried everything, even getting him drunk, but Uriah did not go home. (1998, 112)

In Hastings's retelling, the story of the crimes of adultery and murder that lead to a downward spiral in David's fortunes is elaborated and modulated: "he saw a lovely woman bathing and combing her hair" and "was so struck by her beauty and grace that he gave orders for Bathsheba to be brought before him." Apparently grace makes desire more acceptable than beauty alone, but, Bathsheba's hair-combing skills notwithstanding, the attempt to draw attention away from the bath to her gracefulness is awkward. So too is introduction of a courtship: "He talked to her, courted her and made love to her." Adultery leads to murder, but David's attempt to hide his paternity of the child is conveyed through implication only. It is left for the reader to make a connection between Uriah's demurral, "How can I eat and drink with my wife, and sleep safe under my own roof when I know that your whole army is encamped in the open, ready to fight for the nation?," and the letter David writes telling Joab to place him where the fighting is fiercest (2003, 131–32).

Offringa radically alters the story to render it more suitable for young readers and to make David look better. Her choice of the title, "The Rich Man and the Poor Man," shifts attention from the protagonists to the moral of the story,[27] but is in tension with the illustration, which shows

26. All citations are from Rock 2005, 110 (the story appears on 110–11). It is not entirely clear what "arrogance" refers to—this response or David's attitude that as king he can do as he pleases or both.

27. Cf. "David and Bathsheba" (*Candle* 2006, 191; Rock 2005, 110–11; Hastings 2003, 130–31); "David Loses His Senses over Bathsheba" (Baró 1998, 112);

David in the foreground, looking at Bathsheba, who is bathing in a courtyard, her body covered by a thin veil. David sees the woman but does not send for her. He does not even ask, as in the biblical story, who she is,[28] but waits until she has gone inside to ask a servant, "Who lives there?" He cannot forget her, however, and every day he returns to the roof in hopes of seeing Bathsheba again. He sends for her, falls in love with her, and wants to marry her (1994, 120–21).

By means of chronological reversal Offringa absolves David of any sexual crime. Love, not lust, leads to David's desire for Bathsheba, but he knows that she is another man's wife, and the Ten Commandments forbid coveting what belongs to another.[29] David sends Uriah into battle, hoping he will be killed, which would leave David free to marry Bathsheba. Things go "as David hoped." Not only is there no adultery, no pregnancy, and thus no child whose death would require explanation—there are no punishments. Upon hearing Nathan's parable and being told "you are the man," David acknowledges that "it is my fault that Uriah is dead" and that he broke the Ten Commandments in coveting what belonged to another. That is the end of the matter. What was, in the biblical story, David's futile attempt to influence God to spare the child's life by fasting, lying upon the ground, and weeping for the child becomes David's refusal to eat or drink as a sign of his remorse. Offringa ends her retelling of the story of David here, with David going to the tent where the ark of the covenant was kept and kneeling down before God. There is nothing left for him to do but bless Solomon in the next story and die.

Whereas Offringa erases the child, and with it the problem of its death, Steinkühler reports the death of the child but dissociates it from the idea of punishment. David thinks that his sin of adultery and murder is the reason for the infant's death, but Nathan tells Mefi-Boschet that it is not a punishment—just a fact.[30] God wants life, not death, says Mefi-Boschet, who feels that God is sorry about the baby's death (2005b, 191).

"Davids Augen fallen auf eine schöne Frau" [David's Eyes Fall upon a Beautiful Woman] (Steinkühler 2005b, 187).

28. It is not clear in the biblical account who asks, "Is this not Bathsheba…?," whether an attendant, as most translations have it, or David, as Bailey (1990, 85) argues, convincingly in my view.

29. Steinkühler uses this motif too: Michal reminds David of the sixth commandment; Mefi-Boschet, who feels that he is the one who has been deceived by David, says David should heed the tenth commandment (2005, 188).

30. Steinkühler 2005b, 191: "Keine Strafe, sagt Natan, die Wahrheit." Similarly, Samuel reports that, when he asks God how he can allow all the priests of Nob, save one, to be slaughtered, the reply is that the signs of salvation are the God's work but evil is not (161).

The other retellings, like God, are not so forgiving, and, following the biblical account, they present the death of the baby Bathsheba bears to David as punishment for David's crime. Though it is likely to be a troubling idea for a young reader, the moral issue of the death of his innocent baby for David's sins is not addressed. *Candle Bible Stories*, which tells the story of David's sin without using the words "adultery" and "murder" and abruptly introduces these terms when it passes judgment upon David, is the most unsettling (2006, 191–93). "Because he was sorry" David does not have to die, but the baby dies in spite of David's prayers on its behalf. It gradually dawns on the reader how disturbing the accompanying illustration is. It shows a forlorn-looking David and, presumably, Bathsheba, sitting together. Bathsheba seems to be comforting a young girl, who leans into her lap, and a small child is on the floor next to David. Facing them, in the foreground, an older man lifts a baby high up into the air in his arms. The man holding the baby, we realize, is Nathan, who is not saying "goochie goochie goo" but condemning him to death.[31]

Perhaps in an effort to make the story slightly less troubling, Rock reports only the prediction but not the death of the child, concluding with a pious and penitent David reciting the words of Ps 51:1 and 10, which gives biblical authority and solemnity to the retelling.[32] Nevertheless, the accompanying illustration, which stretches across two pages, keeps the fate of the innocent baby in the reader's mind. In the foreground an angry Nathan points his accusing finger at a startled David, while a worried Bathsheba stands some distance away, with the baby in her arms.[33] Hastings also ends the story with the prediction, but she begins the next with, "As Nathan had predicted, Bathsheba's son died, but later she gave birth to another boy…Solomon," whom "God loved" (2003, 132). Baró also presents Solomon's birth as a kind of consolation ("A while later the Lord gave them another son, Solomon, who was favored in the eyes of God," 1998, 113)—as though one child could be replaced by another. What is a young reader to make of this idea, biblical though it may be (2 Sam 12:24–25)? Like the information that one baby was loved by God and the other not favored, it is bound to be confusing for children, and distressing for children and parents alike.

31. The identification of David and of Nathan is confirmed by other illustrations.

32. Be merciful to me, O God, because of your constant love. Because of your great mercy wipe away my sins!… Create a pure heart in me, O God, and put a new and loyal spirit in me (Rock 2005, 111, Good News Bible translation).

33. *The Bible: A People Listen to God* shows David fasting and sleeping on the hard floor as his penance (Baró 1998, 113); on the illustration in *The Children's Illustrated Bible*, see above n. 13.

Whereas some retellings follow the biblical account in presenting the child's death as the consequence of David's sin, none dares to indicate the grand scope of David's punishment, the sword that never departs from his house or the evil God raises up against him (2 Sam 12:10–11). Indeed, the misfortunes that befall the house of David are not the stuff of children's literature, and the retellings surveyed here have little to say about events that transpire between the Bathsheba–Uriah affair and Solomon's accession to the throne (2 Sam 13–1 Kgs 1).[34] Those that relate any of these events religiously sever the causal connection the Bible makes between David's compound sin of adultery and murder and his punishments: the rape of his daughter (about which he does nothing), the deaths of his sons Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah (in all of which he unwittingly plays a role),[35] the two revolts that almost destroy his kingdom (one led by his own son, the other on the part of the northern tribes, the tribes formerly loyal to Saul).[36]

Omitting these events or presenting them as unrelated to David's crimes improves David's image by removing him from direct responsibility. It is no longer *his sin* that sets a series of catastrophes in motion. But the character who benefits most is God, who ceases to be the source of the "evil" that besets David's house (2 Sam 12:11). The biblical god who visits the sins of the father upon his children and, worse, uses the children as the instruments of their father's punishment is a terrifying god, certainly not the kind of loving heavenly father most children's Bibles want to represent—"our Father who art in heaven" for many readers of these books—but, as Bottigheimer points out, the god of the Bible is a problematic model for parenthood (1996, 71). And so we have retellings in which David may suffer adversity, but not too much, and it is not his fault—or God's.

In the Bible, one of the consequences of David's sin is Absalom's revolt, a story frequently included in children's Bibles (see Bottigheimer 1996, 81–83). Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar and her brother Absalom murders Amnon, replaying David's sexual sin with Bathsheba

34. Hastings tells only the story of "Absalom's Rebellion." *Candle Bible Stories* tells of Absalom's revolt (in stories for 4 days), and devotes three sentences in one of them to Sheba's revolt; it also tells of Adonijah's designs on the throne and David's unambiguous choice of Solomon. Baró's retelling is the most extensive, devoting attention to the Amnon–Tamar–Absalom story, Absalom's revolt, Sheba's revolt, and Adonijah and Solomon's struggle over the kingship. Steinkühler focuses considerable attention on Absalom's revolt, looking at it from different perspectives, and also deals with Adonijah, Solomon, and the problem of succession.

35. See Gunn 1978, 99–101, 105; Exum 1992, 130, 145.

36. For discussion, see Gunn 1978, 101–4.

and murder of Uriah. When retellings eliminate the crime-and-punishment connection, the fault seems to rest solely with David's wild and reckless sons. Absalom is no longer both a victim of nemesis and a perpetrator of crimes but simply ambitious and grasping. And what is in the Bible a story full of intrigue and complex motivation becomes little more than a warning to young readers about the consequences of filial disobedience, as the titles reveal: "Absalom's Rebellion" (Hastings 2003, 132), "A Rebellious Son" (*Candle* 2006, 193), "Absalom is Too Eager to Be King" (Baró 1998, 115), "Absalom Stabs His Father in the Back."[37] Absalom looks even worse in versions that recount his murder of his half-brother Amnon but gloss over his motivation. Whereas Baró (1998, 114) and Bach and I (1991, 97) explain that Absalom had Amnon killed to avenge the rape of his sister Tamar, *Candle Bible Stories* describes Absalom as "furious" at Amnon for "hurt[ing his] sister," while Hastings removes the sister altogether, telling us only that Absalom "quarrelled with and killed his half-brother." Steinkühler's storyteller Mefi-Boschet imagines that Absalom and Amnon must have really hated each other, but does not say why. Such evasion makes Absalom seem like a bad child who overreacts to a minor offense.

No one explores the extent of Absalom's estrangement from his father, who does nothing to punish Amnon, and who loves Absalom but refuses to see him for years until Absalom forces his hand (2 Sam 14:28–33). In *Candle Bible Stories* both son and father are at fault ("Absalom didn't forgive his father for not accepting him," *Candle* 2006, 194), but David's delay in granting Absalom an audience does not excuse Absalom's resentful feelings that lead to rebellion. Bach and I allude both to the estrangement and to the biblical evidence that Absalom could not have gained such a strong following if David had been as good a king as most retellings have it, when we report that, after their reunion, "David did not show his son the love he had once given so freely," and that Absalom was "resentful of the way his father treated him and unhappy with the way his father governed the land" (1991, 101).[38]

37. Steinkühler 2005b, 192: "Absalom fällt seinem Vater in den Rücken." Illustrations reinforce the lesson about what happens to rebellious children. Those to the retellings of Hastings and Baró show Absalom hanging from his hair; *Candle Bible Stories* shows him hanging by his neck; in Steinkühler's book, which does not have illustrations, the biblical text appears in a box on the page, so that the reader has all the details in an authoritative version.

38. Bach and I include Absalom's revolt as part of the story of "The Wise Woman of Tekoa and the Wise Woman of Abel" (1991, 97–101), but since our intention is to tell stories about women in the Bible, we have little to say about it.

Not only do retellings attach little, if any, blame to David for Absalom's attempt to wrest the kingdom from him, they do not present David's departure from Jerusalem in response as a sign of weakness, or convey either David's sense of discouragement or anything of the hardships he endures as he flees before Absalom's army (it is not even clear that he abandons Jerusalem in Hastings's version).[39] David's intense grief when he learns that Absalom is dead and his wish that he could have died in his son's place makes David appear to be a loving father after all, but the agonizingly poignant picture the Bible gives us—a picture that might lead us to recall the son, only a baby, who died in David's place—has little pathos in these retellings.[40]

On the whole, the David of children's stories is a better man and thus a less interesting, and often less appealing, character than he is in the Bible. And God is a better and less interesting god. One likes to think that the David story could be told for children with more of the ambiguity and complexity of the biblical account, and without a defensive, overly pious attitude toward God. As J. K. Rowling has so brilliantly demonstrated, children's books do not have to have a simplistic view of the world, even a magical world, or a world in which God is a character who intervenes in human affairs. All the retellings surveyed here bring the story of David to its conclusion by showing him, at the end of his long life, appointing his son Solomon to reign after him and advising Solomon to reign wisely.[41] Only one, Steinkühler's, hints that David may have been duped by Nathan and Bathsheba into declaring Solomon king[42]—thus precipitating the death of another of his sons, Adonijah, the

39. Baró (1998, 115) alludes to the fulfillment in the Bible of Nathan's prophecy that God would "take your [David's] wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun. For you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel and before the sun" with "Absalom…continued with the custom of royal successors of keeping his father's wives so that everyone would accept him as king." This is not only vague, it also gives a false impression of the fate of these women; see 2 Sam 16:22 and 20:3.

40. Baró makes a good attempt in "Did David Cry for His Victory" (1998, 117), but Steinkühler recounts events more suggestively, through Mefi-Boschet's eyes (2005b, 96). On the biblical account, see Exum 1992, 130–35.

41. "David Chooses Solomon to Be King" (*Candle* 2006, 197); "Solomon the Wise" (Rock 2005, 112); "King Solomon's Wisdom" (Hastings 2003, 135); "Solomon, King, Rich, and Wise" (Baró 1998, 119); "The Wisdom of Solomon" (Bach and Exum 1989, 145). Offringa ("De wijsheid van konig Salomo," 1994, 22) omits the advice.

42. Steinkühler 2005b, 201–2, but she implicates only Bathsheba, not Nathan. And she does it subtly: Solomon suspects that Bathsheba is behind his success and that David is duped, but comes to realize that his becoming king is God's will.

rightful heir (1 Kgs 1–2). Not surprisingly, none makes him vindictive, settling old scores by telling Solomon to have Joab and Shimei killed, though Steinkühler (2005b, 203) does have him warn Solomon to keep an eye on Joab.

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MICHAL AND DAVID: LOVE BETWEEN ENEMIES?

Athalya Brenner

Michal: Or, A Fragment of a Literary Life

In order to construct a *sketch* of Michal and David's relationship, we have to bring together passages that appear in different parts of the books of Samuel. These texts are: 1 Sam 14:49; 18:20–28; 19:11–17, 25, 44; 2 Sam 3:12–17; and 6:15–23 (the latter have to be compared with the shorter version of 1 Chr 15:25–29). A biographical or semi-biographical ongoing "*story*" of Michal is even more difficult to construct, since information about her is not only fragmentary, but also and certainly male-relational; the fragments are embedded within a larger context whose main concern is for David. To use a variation based on an idiom coined by J. Cheryl Exum, Michal is a "fragmentary woman,"[1] and her story is an incidental component of the dominant histories recounting the men in her literary life. Those men are Michal's father, King Saul; Michal's brother, Jonathan; Michal's husband, King David; Michal's second husband, Palti[el]; and finally, once again, Michal's first husband, King David. Biblical authors seem not to have lent her much significance for her own sake: they present her mainly as derivative from the lives and ambitions of her male blood- and societal kin. In order to construct a Michal story, the fragments have to be brought together and somehow arranged in a way that will make sense for "*her*," not only for her male kin.

A short summary of the textual "facts," then. Saul promises one of his daughters to the victorious, foreskin-bearing David. Michal loves David and is given to him (1 Sam 18). When Saul searches for David in order to kill him, Michal helps her husband escape (1 Sam 19). Thereafter she is given as wife to Palti[el] (1 Sam 25:44). After Saul and Jonathan have died and David ascends to power, he demands her back and gets her back

1. J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1993).

(2 Sam 3:13–14). When David brings the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6), Michal sees him out of the window behind which she is sitting. She criticizes his shameless manner of dancing during the Ark procession. The last word in the verbal exchange that follows is David's: he says his behaviour is motivated by his love for YHWH. As a result of this confrontation marital relations between the two seem to cease: Michal remains childless "until the day she dies" (v. 23).[2]

This fragmented biography is gleaned from the books of Samuel. The parallel account of the last confrontation between Michal and David is contained in Chronicles in one verse only: she sees him dancing and sporting and despises him in her heart (1 Chr 15:29). Thereafter we hear nothing more of her. And so Michal disappears out of the bible.

When this patchy non-story is summarized as has been done here, it is a poster at best, lacking depth and human interest. When it is filled in with the help of implied or supplied motivations and events (as is unavoidably done during regular processes of reading and interpretation), it is clear that many things have remained unspoken. In order to tell Michal's story, additional data are necessary. One manner of doing this is to follow in the footsteps of Tamara Eskenazi and David Clines. Eskenazi and Clines have collected and retold traditional, scholarly and literary texts about Michal and David in which, through the centuries to the near-present, a multi-focal vision on the married pair is achieved; as editors they also allow Michal the label "Queen," as per the collection's title: *Telling Queen Michal's Story*.[3] By collecting and arranging versions of the Michal story from various times and places, Eskenazi and Clines have created a new Michal, fuller and more alive, reconstructed as per the editors' selections.

Michal: Multi-focalized

But to return to the biblical narratives, as fragmented as they are. Even if we put the passages listed together into a narrated chronology, that is, if we join the fragments into a continual "story," some basic questions—such as the ones put forward by Mieke Bal concerning narrated

2. 2 Sam 21:8 attributes five children to Michal, from her husband "Adriel." This apparent contradiction of textual data is variously solved by scholars and by the ancient Jewish sages. The former tend to read "Merab" (Saul's eldest daughter) here, since in 1 Sam 18:17 she is given to Adriel as wife; and the latter read "until the day she [Michal] died"—literally, that is, she did give birth on that day, then died.

3. Tamara C. Eskenazi and David J. A. Clines, eds., *Telling Queen Michal's Story* (JSOTSup 119; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991).

perspectives and foci—remain applicable to Michal's story as well as to others. Whose viewpoint is the dominant one? How are the textual events focalized? Is the focalizer, he or she, the story's (implied) narrator?[4] Or do we get, consistently or otherwise and where, a perspective of Michal, or of David, or of Michal's elder sister Merab, or of Michal's brother Jonathan, or of another family member or another of David's wives—in short, of any participant in this "story"? As readers we become engaged by, even embroiled in, the texts and follow avidly the intrigues and machinations of Saul's royal house and then David's. Our involvement is greatly influenced by the apparent tendency of most biblical authors—to judge from the texts themselves—to prefer David and love him above Saul, attributing their own choice to god's choice. Their preference for David over Saul and his family is evident from David's very first appearances. Those authors, then, share David's implied perspective: in other words, they focus through David—David is the ever-present if implied focalizer in Michal's story as well as in most other stories related to him. Thus is Michal minimized once again: first by fragmentation; then also by focalization, by being presented in a manner specifically supportive of her eventually estranged first-then-third husband.

My response to this biased, Davidic focalization is to pursue in what follows the course of a *Rashomon*-informed presentation. *Rashomon*, Akira Kurosawa's black-and-white film of 1950, presents four versions of a gruesome story about a woman's rape and her husband's murder from four perspectives and by four narrators.[5] In this way the film deals with the question, What is the Truth? Or, whose version of events, as set forward by the participants themselves, is the most or only proper or correct version? Can there be a preferred version? In *Rashomon*, the "Truth" is *not* a weaving of the various different or parallel strands into one, eclectic and "correct" (read: "true") version. Taking my cue from the film, I shall here attempt to retell Michal creatively, basing the retelling on the biblical texts but attempting to inhabit by turn the corners occupied by several of the story's figures, not only from David's (and his narrator's) perspective. I shall remain as close as possible to biblical texts, but will perform another kind of fragmentization, so to speak: I shall fragmentize the texts not chronologically but by introducing the largely—if not always—missing motivation for the chief characters in

4. Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (2d ed.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

5. Online: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0042876/; for a somewhat extended fact sheet and review (1998) of *Rashomon*, see also http://movie-reviews.colossus.net/movies/r/rashomon.html.

the midst of their reported textual actions. Taken as a whole, these re-constructed, fictive "stories" may help teasing from the biblical fragments a more complete, if not full, picture: no claim for comprehensiveness will be made. And, in keeping with the heritage of *Rashomon*, and against some scholarly customs, no claim for "Truth" or omniscient accuracy will be made either.

Thus Saul

Why should I volunteer to give one of my daughters to David—a rival, an enchanter, someone with an unexplained charisma, loved by everybody? Clearly, I did not expect him to abide by my conditions: you cannot obtain a hundred Philistine foreskins without killing their owners first, and what can one do with a hundred foreskins anyway—display them somehow, like you display the dead bodies of enemies you kill, for all to see and cringe with fear? What a surprise, I was hoping he would die while pursuing this aim. I can't stand the charming upstart. And yes, I did play upon my daughter Michal's feelings for David, who quickly became everyone's favourite and has wormed his way into the affections of all, including my son Jonathan and my younger daughter. I wanted David to be liquidated. My love and gratitude for him for killing Goliath had long been replaced by hate. My jealousy got the better of me, I must admit: to see how he has become everybody's favourite! Everybody: that is, the people, the court, my children, Samuel the old prophet, our god himself! You can't imagine how difficult all this was for me, it really drove me into depression—and was detrimental to my doing state business. But David brought the foreskins, thus I had to give him Michal in marriage. This was less respectful than giving him the eldest Merab, and Michal loved him anyway. He became my son-in-law and our lives were even more intertwined. Therefore I hated him all the more. I really and truly wanted him to die, but Michal and Jonathan prevented this from happening. They helped him escape. My depression became heavier, I was now pronounced a clinical case and completely under the influence.

Please try to imagine my position. I too started off as everybody's beloved, the tall and handsome, the first king of Israel, the military saviour. I had enjoyed being a favourite. But as I grew somewhat older and the pressure of my position and the constant fighting began to tell, especially the fighting with those arrogant foreigners the Philistines, my place in the people's heart was taken over by another favourite, younger and fresher and a military success in his own right and guerrilla style.

My own children turned against me: they transferred their loyalty to him. They acted as if I was crazy, undermining my weakened position further, and kept David away from me, listened to my commands no more. In short, I was no more the boss in my own household. All this time, the political situation was far from stable with the Philistines getting bolder and moving further into our borders every day.

Michal informed David that he should get away from me: he listened and obeyed. Moreover, she actively planned and executed his escape. She used a trick. She laid a life-size figure (*teraphim*) in his bed, and pretended to my messengers that he was asleep. By the time it was clear that the bird had flown, it was too late to find him. She justified herself by claiming that he had threatened her with death if she didn't help him. That was certainly a lie, but what was I supposed to do, kill my own daughter?

At that time it became evident that my enemy, the one I'd loved as my son and who was my son-in-law, the robber of soul and affection, was trying to become my heir. Although my son Jonathan was a good soldier, he had no ambition for kingship. And I recognized that David could easily use his family relationship with me to acquire the kingship, his appetite for it was evident. I had to do something. This is why I tried to nullify the family relationship by pretending David and Michal were *de facto* divorced. David had deserted her, things were less formal in those days and much depended on whether spouses actually shared a household. I gave Michal in marriage to Palti, a non-entity and thus non-threatening: poetic justice, don't you think, for the daughter who preferred her husband's interests over the interests of her father's household? I knew that she would suffer. I also thought that David would then never take her back as wife, later on. Even if he could, this was not considered an honourable thing to do in our community. It is also formulated later in our holy book, in the name of our god, as a rhetorical question: "The word of the LORD came to me as follows: If a man divorces his wife, and she leaves him and marries another man, can he ever go back to her?" (Jer 3:1a JPS).

My daughter, the poor and stupid lamb. She loved David, she really did. As far as I know, she continued to idolize and love him even when not hearing from him, at all, after his escape. I have no idea how Palti could stand it: that man had no pride. As I've said, a non-entity, not a man's man really. And this is one of the reasons I chose him as an instrument for punishing my daughter for that breach of loyalty.

Thus Palti[el]

King Saul gave me his daughter Michal as wife after the split between him and David. Why did he do it? Perhaps because I was a friend of his son Jonathan; or perhaps because he knew I wasn't a politically ambitious man. At any rate, even after David had to flee Saul's wrath, Michal was still besotted with him—and with her own love for him. I knew that only too well when I married her. It was no secret. I also knew that David didn't care for her. That was no secret either. But Michal, she obeyed her father this time and entered my house.

Our life together wasn't easy. Michal didn't respond to my love. Her desire for David never abated, she longed for him continuously. Sometimes, as I reflected upon it, I suspected that her indifference towards me was precisely what attracted me to her. And, against all hope, I kept waiting, year after year, for a change, for her to capitulate to my kindness. But this rarely happens in real life, does it? Michal's prayers were eventually answered when David asked Mephibosheth, Saul's lame son, and Abner son of Kish, of Saul's family and his one-time general, to bring her back to him. That this was a trick for establishing his legitimacy over Israel was clear to all, apart from to Michal herself.

Could David, legally, do that? There were two aspects to the case. First, according to our customs, you can't remarry a first wife after she'd been given to another: this may cause an issue of uncertain paternity. David got out of this one by arguing that the situation in this case was different: *he* hadn't sent Michal away, *he* never divorced her, *her father* took her away, hence she was still his betrothed wife and allowed to him, whereas my so-called marriage to her was null and void.[6] And second, there was a question of power: I couldn't oppose the demands of Abner and the rest of Israel's elders, who pointed out that my personal sacrifice would be for the collective good (2 Sam 3:6–16).

Michal never saw the transparency of David's political machinations. She hastened to go with Abner, no time wasted. She didn't bother to take leave, she walked away silently with her head held high as always. She's always been haughty. What was she thinking? But I, because of my love, I, I followed her. I begged, I tried to talk to her, walking after her, screaming and howling and sobbing, until Abner sent me back. And she never even graced me with a backwards glance.

If I had had any male honour, any integrity, I publicly lost it on that day. I made a spectacle of myself. We have a saying, "If a man offers all

6. See Deut 24:1–4, and below, for David's version.

his wealth for love, He would be laughed at to scorn" (Song 8:7b JPS). But, do you know, even now, now that Michal has made me into the proverbial village idiot, laughing stock to men and women alike, even now, I'd take her back any day. I would. However, she doesn't want to.

Upon reflection, I can see that my unrequited love for Michal is the mirror image of her unrequited love for David. Unfortunately, she doesn't see the analogy. She also doesn't see the other analogy, the other mirror image to my tale, in what David has done by now, that is, once again take a woman from her husband, Bathsheba from Uriah, simply because this is what he wanted to do. Or perhaps now Michal does see? I have no idea. As I said, I never counted for much with this enigmatic-woman-without-a-secret, my love Michal. And her brother Jonathan, my friend, was not there to comfort me. He had died, Saul had died; I had no recourse, legal or emotional.

Thus Jonathan

My friend, my love, David, he was also the love of my sister Michal. Who would have imagined that the only man I could have ever loved would also be the great love of my sister, that we would compete for his attention and would also cooperate, despite of our rivalry and pain, in rescuing him to safety from our father Saul? I went further than offering David "half a kingdom": I was prepared and happy for him to have the full kingship over all Israel.[7] And Michal risked her life in order to save his.

And David himself? How did he feel about it? In my case, I can't complain much. In his lament for me and for my father (2 Sam 1), after our heroic death in battle, he states that my love—for him—was better than the love of women. A little cryptically, don't you think? Note, please, that he mentions my love for him, not his love for me. But perhaps, I'd still like to preserve this illusion, he preferred my love for him to my sister's love for him? Is this at all possible? I'll never know.

Poor Michal. Poor me. What was David doing, thinking, feeling?

7. "When David finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan's soul became bound up with the soul of David; Jonathan loved David as himself… Jonathan and David made a pact, because Jonathan loved him as himself. Jonathan took off the cloak and tunic he was wearing and gave them to David, together with his sword, bow, and belt…" (1 Sam 18:1, 3–4; JPS; see also chs. 20 and 23)

Thus David

Michal was and is a shrew, a bitch. So totally different from her brother Jonathan. She's always been proud, caustic, critical, full of her own imagined magnitude and her petty interests. Who is she anyhow, a first-generation Jewish Princess? Yes, and she always imagined that her motives were grounded in her love for me, something that I never quite bought.

Indeed, she didn't lie to her father. I did threaten to kill her if she didn't help me escape from him. He, Saul, blamed her for what she didn't actually want to do. She never wanted to betray him. He didn't understand that her status as princess meant more to her than her alleged love for me, that until the end of her days she was more "daughter of Saul" than "wife of David"—indeed, the bible repeats her daughterly status again and again, so even long after her father Saul is dead.[8] She never was completely "wife of David," not to mention "wife of Palti." Her real tragedy, let me tell you, is not her so-called unrequited love for me. It is her father's inability to appreciate her fidelity to him, so much so that she pretended to love me so as to marry me and keep me under surveillance. People don't understand that women can be as political as men. People prefer to attribute love to a woman, as motivation for her action, instead of recognizing her political ambitions. The bitch, she managed to trick everyone but me. And it backfired at the end. At any rate, for a long time I was the only one who knew the truth. Well, perhaps she was attracted to me, to begin with; but her "love" was always, always, subjected to her political vision.

In fact, it was a relief to get away from both her and her father. (I must admit, though, that getting away from Jonathan was painful.) So why did I eventually ask to have her back? Political considerations, to be sure: she was, after all, the daughter of the former and now dead king. Problem was, she had meanwhile been the wife of another. So I studied the relevant passage of our holy canon extremely carefully:

8. Michal is named 18 times in the Hebrew bible. In nine occurrences, in the passages from Samuel and Chronicles referred to above, she is called "Michal daughter of Saul'; in two other references she is "Michal his [Saul's] daughter" (1 Sam 14:49; 18:27). Only once is she "Michal his [David's] wife," when she helps David escape through the window (1 Sam 19:11), and once "my wife" when David wants her back (2 Sam 3:14). This has been widely noticed by readers, ancient as well as (post)modern, without relativizing Michal's textual love for David.

> A man takes a wife and possesses her. She fails to please him because he finds something obnoxious about her, and he writes her a bill of divorcement, hands it to her, and sends her away from his house; she leaves his household and becomes the wife of another man; then this latter man rejects her, writes her a bill of divorcement, hands it to her, and sends her away from his house; or the man who married her last dies. Then the first husband who divorced her shall not take her to wife again, since she has been defiled—for that would be abhorrent to the LORD. You must not bring sin upon the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a heritage. (Deut 24:1–4)

Oh yes, I said to myself. A close *peshat*-style reading of this passage is in order. I wasn't really the one to send her away, and I never gave her a bill of divorce; neither did Palti: in fact, her marriage to that one was legally null and void, illegal. Furthermore, gossip had it that she and Palti never had sexual relations: here I must grant that, if gossip was true, she remained loyal to me. She always had a sense of propriety, as befits a true snob. Moreover, I had no intention to sleep with her: I never felt any love towards her—it was always a marriage of convenience. So I got her back. And she learnt, quickly and unmistakably, and to her disappointment, that the act was merely formal. Consequently and probably because of her frustration, if she had any love for me at all, there was now no trace of it. She was bitter and more critical than ever. Look for instance at her criticism of me when I danced in front of the Ark while bringing it to Jerusalem. It contained sexual allusions. And this is the reason, precisely so, that she had no children. I found it absolutely unsavoury to have any physical contact with her. And I wanted to punish this king's daughter. Her punishment was that her royal house died, heirless, with her.

Thus Michal

I loved David with a passion. For many years. I loved him since the very first moment I saw him. In fact, I'm the only woman in our holy canon accredited with *loving* a man—not a child, not another woman (like Ruth is reported to have loved Naomi in Ruth 4:17), but a grown-up man. This is neither reported about Rebekah, whom Isaac loved so that he was consoled for his mother's death, nor about Rachel, whom Jacob loved so dearly on first sight. These or any other woman are never described as loving their husbands. But it is specifically so written about me, and rightly so.[9]

9. Respectively: Gen 24:67; 29:18; 1 Sam 18:20.

I loved an enemy of my father, totally and without reservation to begin with. I knew that David didn't return my love. But after he'd won me as a trophy and then married me, I remained hopeful that I could win his affections. I believed in him and in his leadership potential; I could see he was the people's favourite and that his popularity grew as my father's declined; and I also had a vision of myself as queen: perhaps not as a single wife given our polygamous society, but as a senior wife. Personal survival and even ambition do not necessarily stand in opposition to love. In any case, you can see that I didn't enter the marriage blinded by starry-eyed love. I too had an agenda, in addition to my emotions.

I stuck to this combination of love for David and self-interest throughout my life. That David preferred the company of other women, not to mention my brother Jonathan's company, was quickly apparent. That he threatened me with death if I didn't help him escape from my father is true. And that pretty quickly I developed feelings toward him that were a mixture of love and resentment, well, that didn't help our relationship when he finally recalled me.

Was I aware that David's motivation for demanding me back was political? Naturally. How could I not, with the timing and manner of the recall? But I held my own counsel, for his sake as well as mine. For years I'd been hoping for a child by him, a child of my father's house that would eventually inherit the throne. When I was brought back I was but a shadow of my former self, an archaeological piece, politically functional but personally tired after my long exile (as I always saw it). The reunion, after several years, was painful: not only for David, but also for me. We were strangers in spite of the past that bound us together. Moreover, David had other wives—Ahinoam and Abigail are but two examples—who joined him during more and less dramatic periods in his stormy life. Thus, slowly but surely, the balance in my feelings for David changed even further. Gradually, gratitude and love lost ground to hate, in addition to resentment. Still, like the chief figures in the novel *Enemies: A Love Story*,[10] we were too caught up with each other, we couldn't extricate ourselves from our situation.

In the novel, written by Isaac Bashevis Singer, a Shoah survivor in New York called Herman (which means "army man" or "person of high rank," ironic in relation to the book's character, but still) has a wife whom he brought over from the Old World because she had helped save him, although by now and also before he has nothing in common with her. In addition, he has a neurotic mistress, again a Shoah survivor, that

10. Isaac Bashevis Singer, *Enemies: A Love Story* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1972). The 1989 film version was directed by Paul Mazursky.

he loves but has a difficult relationship with. Then, in steps Tamara, his first wife from the Old World, before the War, the mother of his two perished children, whom he had left for another woman… I've always felt that Singer, the Nobel Laureate, has plagiarized our own story in David's court, or Harem if you will. I am Michal/Tamara, the returning First Wife. We were all bound together; and remained enemies/lovers, interwoven, captured in the sinister tale of our circumstances. So I began to torment my husband, my husband in title only. I was by then already driven by hate and frustration more than by anything else. I felt punished by everything he did: by the fact that he had other wives with whom he slept, and children that were not mine and that should have been mine. And I was less careful with my tongue than in days gone by, much to my own detriment. I should have been more careful of what I said to him on the occasion of the Ark's coming to Jerusalem. I should have. This spoilt the little of the good will—and little enough it was—that had remained between us.

So said the prophet:

> …the LORD is a witness between you and the wife of your youth with whom you have broken faith, though she is your partner and covenanted spouse. Did not the One make all, so that all remaining life-breath is His? And what does that One seek but godly folk? So be careful of your life-breath, and let no one break faith with the wife of his youth. For I detest divorce—said the LORD, the God of Israel—and covering oneself with lawlessness as with a garment—said the LORD of Hosts. So be careful of your life-breath and do not act treacherously. (Mal 2:14–16 JPS)

David didn't pay heed to such passages of the holy writ unless they suited his purpose of the moment. So I was punished. But he was punished as well: just read what happened to him in Jerusalem, the violence and irregularities in his household and kingdom. And this affords me hollow satisfaction; and sorrow as well.

Enemies, then: a love story. I rest my case.

Part V

RE-LOCATING DAVID

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Through a Window: A Postcolonialist Reading of Michal

Judith E. McKinlay

In 2 Sam 6:12b–16 a scene is set, displayed there before our eyes in all its great bodily dancing and leaping and rejoicing, in all its shouting and trumpet calls. We, as readers, are invited to enter this space and watch.[1] The ark is coming into Jerusalem, who can but rejoice? But then our gaze shifts—to Michal, looking on, but through a window, not rejoicing but despising. What are we to do? Do we look away again, imagining ourselves as ancient Israelites, joining the rejoicers? For this is David dancing; this is the triumph of David, the king, the one chosen by God.[2] This is David bringing the ark, the very symbol of God's presence into Jerusalem, the city now to be God's earthly footstool. If the scene is extravagant in its celebration, surely that is justified? For this has not been an easy or unchequered coming. This is the climax of a long journeying, as the singing and shouting finally blocks out the cry borne long ago by Eli's grandson, Ichabod, "the glory [i.e. of the ark] has departed" (1 Sam 4:21). It now comes in all its awful power, leaving in its wake not only the blessing on the house of Obed-edom, but the smitten body of Uzzah (2 Sam 6:7–11).

1. See Robert Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 61, who comments on the frequent use of the imperfect verb forms: "A main function of such forms is to place the reader in the center of the action, often by presenting activity from the temporal perspective of characters: the narrator describes things as if the reader were observing what is happening in the story-world—even as the characters themselves do."

2. As C. L. Seow, *Myth, Drama, and the Politics of David's Dance* (HSM 44; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), demonstrates, the ancient Near Eastern rituals celebrating victories of the divine warrior provide a mythic key for understanding this scene.

But we are not ancient Israelites, and we are not present in tenth-century Jerusalem; this is text, and text is always political, always written for a reason. This is, moreover, text lying at the heart of the deuteronomistic history. While Martin Noth may have declared that the Deuteronomistic writer "has no intention of fabricating the history of the Israelite people," but rather "wished to present it objectively and base it upon the material to which he had access," David Gunn has been among those teaching us to be suspicious of all such claims of objectivity. But Noth added a rider, that "we shall find that he has crafted a work of art which merits our respect."[3] The pleasure of reading David reading David has been in the recognition of this respect, that this is "serious entertainment…demand[ing] the active engagement of those being entertained, which challenges their intellect, their emotions, their understanding of people, of society, and of themselves."[4]

As a viewer, I join a scholarly queue what have long been at the scene, following its well-plotted sequence. I recognize that bringing the ark has been "a brilliant maneuver";[5] that "Jerusalem is now a legitimate shrine, …God is now patron and has taken up residence in David's city";[6] that "the return of YHWH's glory and 'throne' to the city of David is at the same time an occasion for David to 'get himself glory.'"[7] But whose manoeuvre has this been? I find myself stepping away to consider Baruch Halpern's question: "was this a repatriation [of the ark], or was it the invention of a tradition?" His conclusion that "[w]hat we have in Samuel and Kings is a rhetoric—certainly not a reality"[8] leads me to leave aside the pros and cons of any underlying historical reality. My concern is with the functioning of this text as rhetoric.

As I enter the scene Jerusalem is being claimed as sacred space. But though Jerusalem is the central focus, now as holder of the ark, the sacred space above all spaces, its name is never given, for this is equally, in political terms, the space of the king, whom tradition holds to be king

3. Martin Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (trans. J. Doull et al.; JSOTSup 15; Sheffield: JSOT, 1981), 84.

4. David M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation* (JSOTSup 6; Sheffield: JSOT, 1978), 61.

5. Seow, *Myth, Drama, and the Politics of David's Dance*, 1.

6. Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, Ky.: John Knox, 1990), 250.

7. Bruce Rosenstock, "David's Play: Fertility Rituals and the Glory of God in 2 Samuel 6," *JSOT* 31 (2006): 66.

8. Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 292, 298–99.

above all kings. This is the *city of David*.[9] And all is activity, all vitality, all extravagant bodily celebration. *All the house of Israel* are party to this grand victorious entry. But I hesitate, and remind myself that it is a scene conceived by the text's writer(s); it is a "conceptualized" space,[10] carefully shaped to provide the key for my understanding of David and Jerusalem. Yet a few verses on, there is another witness to the scene, witnessing from within the text: Michal. Occupying no textual space at all in vv. 12–15, she is introduced in v. 16, as an "other" person, one not included in *all the house of Israel*. In another space, both figuratively and literally, she is viewing the event through her window, and not rejoicing. Her "heart" reacts, yet that reaction is hidden; "clandestine and underground,"[11] it is not expressed—yet! That there are two spaces set against each other is clear; in traditional binary terms there is a centre and a periphery, and it is David, the ark and all Israel that dominate the centre. I am being programmed, and signal to myself: watch out!

As I keep watching I am reminded of Mary Douglas's observation that "[j]ust as it is true that everything symbolizes the body, so it is equally true that the body symbolizes everything else."[12] Bodies and space are both symbolically significant in this text: David, with his bodily dancing so overtly occupying the central space and Michal, largely disembodied through her window, present and yet not fully present, only her heart reacting. It almost seems as if the spatial theorist, Henri Lefebvre, had been reading this very text when he wrote that "the 'heart' as *lived* is

9. As the French spatial theorist, Henri Lefebvre, comments, "Power…is everyday *in space*… Power has extended its domain right into the interior of each individual, …to the 'utopias' hidden in the folds of subjectivity," quoted in Rob Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle: Spatial Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 1999), 124–25. John T. Willis, "David and Zion in the Theology of the Deuteronomistic History: Theological Ideas in 2 Samuel 5–7," in *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J. J. M. Roberts* (ed. B. F. Batto and K. L. Roberts; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 125–40 (138), suggests that this implies the city is David's personal possession, and therefore "politically neither North Israel nor Judah has any claim to it."

10. This is the translation of what Lefebvre calls *représentations de l'espace*. Lefebvre offered three spatial categories, the *perceived, conceived and lived spaces* in his challenge to binary categories, suggesting that there was always another, *il y a toujours l'Autre*. This three-way understanding of space was further developed by Edward Soja, under his categories of Firstspace, Secondspace and Thirdspace, the latter expanded as Thirding-as-Othering.

11. Terms used of Lefebvre's third category, *l'espace vécu*.

12. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 122.

strangely different from the heart as…*perceived.*"[13] He continues, "under the pressure of morality, it is even possible to achieve the strange result of a body without organs—a body chastised, as it were, to the point of being castrated."[14] Looking through the window from David's—and apparently the narrator's—viewpoint, am I seeing a textually castrated Michal? Already anticipating v. 23? It is David's unrestrained frontal bodily dancing that causes the strident intercourse that follows. It may be wholly a wordy "intercourse," but an unspoken sense of sexuality seems to pervade the scene, although what exactly David is doing with his body remains teasingly unclear.[15]

Whatever it is, this dancing is taking place in sacred space, and I am told that it is enacted before the God of Israel. I am to consider it appropriate, for if this is liturgy and liturgy is celebration, then the more unrestrained, the more full-bodied, the more it is to be viewed as expressive of heartfelt devotion to the god.[16] But I am suspicious, for acted out in this central dominant space it is surely more than pure religious ecstasy. If this is ritual, it is also political ritual; I sense that all Israel is watching David's move to assert his role as ruler of Israel. If it is a new beginning, then perhaps the usual constraints do not apply. I gaze again at David,

13. The terms in italics refer respectively to his third and first spatial categories, the latter referring to "space perceived (*perçu*) in the commonsensical mode," whereas *l'espace vécu* "is space *as it might be* fully lived" in a utopian sense (Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle*, 160).

14. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (trans. D. Nicholson-Smith; Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 [1974]), 40.

15. The meaning of the verbs describing his actions, *mᵉkarker* and *mᵉpazzer*, is not clear. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*. Vol. 3, *Throne and City* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1990), 196, suggests that "[p]ointing to the feet and the hands of David, the participles are a merismus for the ruler in a total movement which stands for total surrender." Chronicles replaces *mᵉkarker* with the verb *rqd* ("to leap"). As Daniel Bodi, *The Michal Affair: From Zimri-lim to the Rabbis* (Hebrew Bible Monographs 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005), 47–48, notes, the verb *šḥq* in v. 21 is also ambiguous, being used of intimate love-play in Gen 26:8 but also of revelling before the golden calf in Exod 32:6. Seow, *Myth, Drama, and the Politics of David's Dance*, 108, argues from the noun *kr* that *mᵉkarker* "must refer to a skipping, prancing movement like that of a ram," and he notes the use of the Ugaritic cognate in *KTU* 1.4 V 27–30 to express El's "vigorous and passionate dance of joy" at the approach of Athirat (p. 111). He also notes the cognates of *mᵉpazzer*, referring to the lively and frisking movements of animals.

16. This runs counter to Rosenstock's suggestion, "David's Play," 74–75, that David is "deliberately mocking his own phallic power" and refusing to "compete with YHWH for glory," so that his "self-revelation is precisely counterpoised with YHWH's self-concealment." Nor am I persuaded by Rosenstock that the narrative is to be read against the background of a *hieros gamos* ritual.

unsure of what I am seeing. Theodore Jennings reads the servant girls' reactions as evidence "that it is his genitals that are especially in view here,"[17] but the text does not explicitly state this, and there is that matter of the ephod, which may or may not have been as skimpy as some suggest. First Chronicles 15:27 puts David in a fine linen robe as well as the ephod, although Jennings may well be right in suggesting that "the cleaning up of this story by the Chronicler tells us what to look for in the saga of 2 Samuel."[18] I become all the more aware that the text itself is directing my eye to gaze at David. Nowhere, even in the larger narrative, does the text describe Michal. Nowhere do I ever catch a glimpse of a beautiful woman, and certainly not now through the window.[19] It is David's body that occupies the foreground in a performance signaling the construction of his own political space.

But construction has also meant destruction, the clearing away of the detritus of earlier politics and political spaces. And this is complex, for the woman distanced from the scene by the window is lodged in David's own house; she is his wife. The dualist categories of centre and periphery begin to break down. While the window motif may bring memories of that earlier window episode of 1 Sam 19:11–17, reminding us of a loyal and loving Michal,[20] more truly David's wife, the transferring and bartering of Michal, by both Saul and David, has intervened (1 Sam 25:44; 2 Sam 3:13–15). The narrator, perhaps in agreement with the kings, allowed no indication of her wishes or reactions. This Michal is merely a wifely object. But here the narrator does not even allow her that; the Michal looking through the window, is now to be seen not as wife of David, but as *daughter of Saul*. And yet this daughter of Saul, half-removed from the scene, is still in David's house. The tension is marked.

17. Theodore Jennings, "YHWH as Erastes," in *Queer Commentary and the Hebrew Bible* (ed. K. Stone; JSOTSup 334; London: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 36–74 (52). But, as Gunn (*The Story of King David*, 74) notes, the verb *glh* does not necessarily imply "'uncovering himself' literally," although, as Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 199, comments "it touches the realm of sexuality with a suggestiveness."

18. Jennings, "YHWH as Erastes," 50.

19. Adele Berlin, "Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David's Wives," *JSOT* 23 (1982): 69–85 (72).

20. Although the verb "love" is a term associated with the expression of covenant loyalty and commitment, Saul's reactions and the fact that Michal "loved" David before her marriage as well as after would seem to suppose something more akin to our own understanding of emotional love, in line with the verb's use in the Song of Songs. As Bodi, *The Michal Affair*, 16, argues, "the recognition of the fact that the term 'love' can stand for an emotion as well as for a political allegiance is of crucial importance for the correct understanding of this story."

But if, at first, Michal is seen as a silent watcher, once the celebration has come to its formal close she emerges to meet David. Would I have anticipated this? Is this where the opposition of centre and margin does indeed break down? Cultural theorist bell hooks, read through the spatial theorist Edward Soja, writes of the margins as "spaces where we begin the process of re-vision." Is this how Michal has been using her marginal experience? Last seen in 2 Sam 3:16, being returned, whether willing or unwilling, to David, she gets no mention at all in 5:13, in the notice of more concubines and wives. And yet as she emerges, openly daring to enter the public space, this is no peripheral Michal. hooks talks in terms of "push[ing] against oppressive boundaries," but warns that the space of "radical openness" that results is inherently "risky," that it is "not a 'safe' space," and one which "needs a community of resistance."[21] Yet the Michal leaving her house to move into David's politically centred open space is alone and unsupported. The repeated *all* (Hebrew *kol*) in v. 19 emphasizes her isolation. Her vulnerability is highlighted by Cheryl Exum's observation that houses are more than buildings, that symbolically and literally "the house is both place and lineage, shelter and posterity. When women go outside, houses are cut off."[22] And again, that further complication: this is David's house. It is, moreover, not simply the physical move that is risky, and "not safe." The Michal I saw at her window was an object available for viewing, but little more than that; the Michal now emerging is claiming the right of a subject. Does David want this? Judith Butler talks of the "scandal" of "the sudden intrusion, the unanticipated agency, of a female 'object' who inexplicably returns the glance, reverses the gaze, and contests the place and authority of the masculine position."[23] Her own study complicates, rightly, the relationships of power, but I was immediately reminded of the "scandal" of Michal troubling David.

So she emerges, now a full-bodied woman in full voice. He is coming to bless—an act one might have thought more fitting for YHWH than for David—she to challenge. Silent no longer, she is articulate in her

21. bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (Boston, Mass.: South End, 1990), 145; Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), 85.

22. J. Cheryl Exum, "Murder They Wrote: Ideology and the Manipulation of Female Presence in Biblical Narrative," in *The Pleasure of Her Text: Feminist Readings of Biblical and Historical Texts* (ed. A. Bach; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 45–68 (56).

23. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), ix.

despising, "the space of speech envelop[ing] the space of bodies."[24] Where she herself was earlier treated as object, she now addresses her husband objectively as *King David*, yet no honorifics or respectful abasement terms expected of a wife. Instead she hurls the term *reqim*,[25] as the final clinching strike in this confrontational attack. The sarcasm is palpable as the narrator's repetition gains its point; it is indeed as the *daughter of Saul* that she now refers to her husband as *the king of Israel*. I detect a careful maneuvering of my reading. I realize, too, that I have been led to follow Michal with that key word "despised" uppermost in my mind, for while her reaction has been hidden from David, it has been purposefully exposed and revealed by the narrator in v. 16.

There is no gap, no space for me to stop and reconsider; David's response is immediate and sharp, countering her directly. There is a literal shaping, a crafting of textual space, beginning and ending his speech with the words "before YHWH," the divine name which has been entirely missing in her accusation. Far from his dancing and uncovering being an extravagant act of *hubris*, all has been framed in devotion to God. In this key representational space, the scandal is not David's but Michal's; not only has her accusation signaled a disloyalty to him, it has shown a complete disregard of his relationship with God, who has, as he does not fail to tell her, appointed him over her father and therefore over her own house.[26] The double reference to his rule as *over the people of YHWH, over Israel* repeats the point.

His second sentence is as carefully constructed as the first, moving as it does from Michal's charge of contemptible exposure to its climax of honouring—but by the servant women! They are the ones capable of recognizing what is honourable, not her! If, before, Michal was isolated spatially, she is now isolated verbally. It is the other women present in this text—those never in full gaze, never heard in their own voice, the

24. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 403.

25. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry*, 199, takes the literal "empty" as the equivalent of "scum." See also Judg 9:4; 11:3 and 2 Chr 13:7. There may well also be a class factor here, in that her protest is about his uncovering before the women servants of his servants.

26. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 252, writes, "The words pile up to establish David's claim of legitimacy: 'Yahweh chose me…above…above…to be prince over… [over].' …The entire exchange moves toward the Yahwistic claim at the center… In the center of the exchange (v. 21), David makes the claim that establishes his preeminence and dismisses Michal and the entire Saulide claim." That he refers to himself as a *nagid* and not a *melek* most probably signifies his piety. As Brueggemann comments regarding 2 Sam 5:3, it "leaves room for the kingship of Yahweh" (p. 238).

lowest in the hierarchy, serving the servants—who are the ones respected as fully understanding the piety of David, honouring him as all should, however extreme his abasement. They can recognize true piety. They are true women.[27] Michal has misread the situation, reading a liturgical display as sexual when it has clearly expressed the king's faithful devotion to his god. Indeed, far from recognizing the essential nature of his acts, Michal, as her name attests, has been like a god![28] This is indeed no innocent text. Michal's challenge has been roundly dismissed, and the servant women co-opted by David. The centre/periphery divide is back in place, with the message for Michal, and would-be Michal followers: encroach onto a space that is not yours, speak out as you should not speak, and consequences will follow. I should not be surprised, for in challenging David's "honour" Michal is challenging David's worthiness of both the title and the position of king. If this is the action of a loyal daughter of Saul, claiming a rightful place in the central space of Israelite politics, her claim is not upheld by the narrator, for she is his pawn, a final bit player in the drama of the fall of the Saulide dynasty. It is carefully told; I am to be convinced that Michal's perception is a distortion of the truth revealed to Israel, and revealed as honourable before Israel's God. There is a poignancy in watching a character so unaware of the narrator's plotline and its sequence.

The linking of vv. 22 and 23 reveals the narrator at his work. What a weighting on the "and" (*vav*)![29] Any possibility that I, as a reader, might still be inclined to side with Michal, despite her blatant disloyalty, must be countered. It could be understood with Ps 132:18, "His enemies I will clothe with disgrace," but it is more than that.[30] No children! Again the bodilyness of this.[31] She may have claimed a brief subject position in this

27. Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, 67, notes that *ʿamah* is only used in Samuel and Kings "to designate a woman who by word or work furthers the cause of kingship in general and the glory of David's house in particular."

28. Following D. Harvey, "Michal," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3 (ed. G. A. Buttrick; Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 373, reading the combination of letters as "who is like God?"

29. As Gabriel Josipovici, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 22–23, points out, while "the *waw* suggests that there is a connection between Michal's childlessness and her attitude to David… it also leaves us pondering the fact that there might have been quite other reasons for it," that here, as elsewhere, "the issue of causality and responsibility…will never be settled in such a way that we can shut the book and say: now I know."

30. A. Bentzen, "The Cultic Use of the Story of the Ark in Samuel," *JBL* 67 (1948): 37–53, argued for the priority and influence of this psalm.

31. If Rosenstock, "David's Play," 73, is right in seeing the blessing, which is a major focus of this enthronement narrative, "centred around procreative fecundity,"

pivotal ark narrative with her verbal riposte, but her very personhood has now been stripped away. Denial of children not only robs her of her womanhood in this society, but, more significantly in this politically charged context, it robs her of her status as royal wife. For how can she be David's wife, if she cannot perpetuate his line? As David Gunn long ago pointed out, "the accession and sexuality themes are inseparably bound together. She is potentially both a sexual partner and a means of royal legitimation."[32] But she is first and foremost, as the text has kept reminding me, Saul's daughter: no children means no Saulide descendents in David's line. That David already has children, the strategically placed list in the previous chapter (vv. 13–16) has reminded me; as here, his fertile body is kept in view. Not so for Michal; as this chapter ends, she is dismissed, never to be heard again.[33] The Michal/Saulide problem solved, the narrative can move smoothly in the next chapter to God's promise that David's house and kingship "shall be made sure forever," and his "throne established forever." No space left there for Michal.

It is, of course, an ancient story, its dynamics peculiarly Israelite, a Saulide/Davidic clash that ran its course long ago. But texts live on, outrunning the borders of time, and I am reading it in the twenty-first century, where claiming contested territorial and political space continues long after David and ancient Israel. I am, moreover, reading from my own context and identity as the descendent of settlers in a colonizing world. I share with David Gunn a birthplace in Aotearoa New Zealand, in what can be classed as a post-colonial country, although I am mindful of the comment, "What? Post-colonialism? Have they left?"[34] For those of us who have not left, viewing the world through a postcolonial lens has helped us be more aware of the ways colonizing powers claim and maintain their dominance. It is, as Sugirtharajah writes, "a mental attitude rather than a method."[35] One postcolonial strategy offered by

then v. 20 has already prepared the reader for this. By interrupting the act she has set herself outside the blessing.

32. Gunn, *The Story of King David*, 94.

33. Is it "lifelong sequestration," or could it be more than that, as Halpern (*David's Secret Demons*, 313) suggests? "Though there is no evidence that Michal was murdered, she does not appear after this episode."

34. Bobbi Sykes, quoted by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books; Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 1999), 24.

35. R. S. Sugirtharajah, "A Postcolonial Exploration of Collusion and Construction in Biblical Interpretation," in *The Postcolonial Bible* (ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah; The Bible and Postcolonialism 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 91–116 (93). Elsewhere, Sugirtharajah, "Textual Cleansing: A Move from the Colonial to

Musa Dube, writing from Botswana, is "reading sacred and secular texts, ancient and contemporary texts… side by side, to highlight: (a) the ways in which they propound imperializing or decolonizing ideology; (b) their use of gender in the discourse of subordination and domination."[36] Tat-siong Benny Liew describes this as reading the text by way of a detour, through a different literary land(scape), knowing that on return to the biblical text what and how one sees will be changed by the encounters.[37] So I now wish to take a detour by way of Fiona Kidman's novel, *The House of Secrets*.[38] Several reasons lie behind my choice. The novel has a historical base (which may or may not be the case with 2 Samuel), spanning the journeyings of a small Scottish community, led by the Rev. Norman McLeod, from Scotland via Nova Scotia to New Zealand. My paternal ancestors travelled with him, so this setting is part of my own family history. But I am also brought to this text "through the window."

A window breaking opens and closes the novel. Maria, old, frail and exhausted, may no longer look at the world beyond through her window, but the world is now breaking through with small boys throwing stones at the "witch" and breaking the glass. It is Maria herself who frames this narrative, her story enfolding the stories of her mother and grandmother—she is their story, and they hers: "maria maria marisabella mariann annisabellamaria yesyes. Our names blending, mother and daughters all of us."[39] Asked about the recurring themes in her writing, Kidman replied, "Women at the edge of experience…to see how far they will dare to go before they find themselves at the edge of the abyss… One of the recurring themes of my writing is the outsider." *The House of Secrets*, is her "ultimate 'outsider' book, about the witch figure who lives

the Postcolonial Version," *Semeia* 76 (1996): 7–19 (13), defines post-colonialism as a "critical enterprise aimed at unmasking the link between ideas and power…a discursive resistance against imperialism, imperial ideologies, imperial attitudes and their continued incarnations among such wide-ranging fields as politics, economics and history, and theological and biblical studies." Soja connects this with "third-space," seeing "the postcolonial critique" issuing a similar "invitation to continuous deconstruction and reconstitution" (*Thirdspace*, 126).

36. Musa W. Dube, *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000), 199–200. This is only one suggestion from her much longer list.

37. Tat-siong Benny Liew, "Margins and (Cutting-)Edges: On the (Il)Legitimacy and Intersections of Race, Ethnicity, and (Post)Colonialism," in *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections* (ed. S. D. Moore and F. F. Segovia; London: T&T Clark International, 2005), 114–65 (146).

38. Fiona Kidman, *The House of Secrets* (London: Heinemann, 1987).

39. Ibid., 29.

alone at the edge of the community for fifty-five years."[40] In that brief glimpse in 2 Sam 6, Michal was seen almost on the knife edge, making a last bid to challenge the power now held by David. That was her choice. It is the options and the choices of these women on the edge that is Kidman's interest in this novel, explored through the collective female eye/"I" of three generations. How do women decide to respond from their places inside the window? Soja writes of the "strategic flexibility" of that "lived-space" which he terms "thirdspace."[41] It is this "strategic flexibility" that the Deuteronomist hides from our sight but which Kidman explores.

Where David held centre stage in the History, McLeod himself is rarely heard. There is a significant moment, during a crisis at sea, where he declares, "I have seen a vision… In my vision we stand on the edge of a new land, and God speaks to us through the act of merciful deliverance from the elements" and the cry goes up, "We are delivered by the father, our father, Norman McLeod."[42] A reviewer makes the connection: "Like his Old Testament counterparts, McLeod demands absolute allegiance," for this is a "divinely authorized colonization."[43] The women may be McLeod's own people but they, too, are colonized here. It is Kidman who gives them a voice; theirs is another writing, symbolized by the book of secrets, the book within the book, written by the grandmother, and read by Maria, the granddaughter. Theirs is the counter-narrative, for, as Maria says, "We all had a voice, a way of telling it";[44] their three generational telling is "a means of unwriting history…[of] displacing the very source of phallogocentric power."[45]

Like Michal's, this family story began with a marriage across lines of power; for Isabella, wealthy, London born, it was a crossing over into a world of crofters driven from their lands, a world of fervent Calvinist Presbyterians, a world soon to be dominated by Norman McLeod. For her, margins for re-visioning, for providing a "strategic flexibility," were not easily reached. Her retreat to the womb-like sanctuary of a cave with her baby son, after her husband's death, is inevitably abortive. There is

40. Sue Kedgley, *Our Own Country: Leading New Zealand Women Writers Talk about Their Writing and Their Lives* (Auckland: Penguin, 1989), 172.

41. Soja, *Thirdspace*, 13.

42. Kidman, *The House of Secrets*, 73.

43. Elizabeth Rosner, "Silencing the Ventriloquist: The Book of Secrets," *World Literature Written in English* 31 (1991): 80–86 (81).

44. Kidman, *The House of Secrets*, 19.

45. Rosner, "Silencing the Ventriloquist," 81. Although for the woman closest to McLeod, his wife, it is a different "it," for, as Isabella observes, "she is never allowed to speak out for herself" (Kidman, *The House of Secrets*, 50).

no escaping McLeod's control; she is soon found, brought out, and married off, unhappily. He, like David, controls the matters of fertility and bodies. Where Isabella lives in the tension of challenge and compliance, albeit writing her book of secrets, Annie, her daughter, tries to conform and follow the decreed ways of McLeod. It is, ironically, the marginalizing forces of her mother and daughter that she cannot control which make her attempt as abortive as her many miscarriages. Here, too, "the body symbolizes everything else."[46]

For the third generation Maria, McLeod may be dead but not his control. That is continued by his stalwarts of the next generations. Hers again is a bodily story, her long confinement in her house the result of her own attempt to move beyond the boundaries of a tightly controlled world: a brief affair with an outsider that leaves her body pregnant. As for Michal, so for Maria there will be no baby; physically and bodily imprisoned in her room, her experience of birth is experience of death. Disgraced and alienated, she begins a life in exile; forbidden to cross her uncle's land, she cannot leave her house. This is life in exile in the midst of community; this is life behind the window, yet a life enriched despite the isolating constrictions. The boundaries set by the community do not hold completely; for a brief two years the flu epidemic brings into her house and care an "Other" child, part Dalmatian, part Maori. Finally, near the end of her life, when offered the choice of leaving her isolation, she chooses against it, remaining as she has lived, exercising a choice that "push[es] against the oppressive boundaries" in her own way.

The longer Saul narrative brings to light an unexpected connection. A son of Jonathan had survived and was brought by David to live in Jerusalem and eat at his table (2 Sam 9). He was lame, as was Isabella's son Duncan. Although a child of rape, an instance of the outside world's violent irruption, Duncan is deeply loved, yet known as Duncan Cave, he is a constant reminder of Isabella's abortive attempt to escape. Mephibosheth and Duncan Cave: two marginal characters, two names each coded with symbolism.[47] But connection also supplies contrast: Jonathan's son

46. Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 122.

47. 1 Chr 8:34 and 9:40 record this son as Meribbaal. As Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 14, comments, "in Saul's family, either *baʿal* was a title for Yahweh, or Baal was acceptable in royal, Yahwistic circles, or both." He notes the inscriptions on the Samaria ostraca (ninth or eighth centuries) with *baʿal* type names, which "have prompted some scholarly speculation about the widespread acceptance of Baal from the period of the Judges down through the fall of the northern kingdom in 722 BCE, especially in the north." By the time of the Deuteronomistic History, Baal was not acceptable, hence the "shameful" substitution.

is virtually imprisoned at the centre of power, while Duncan freely comes and goes, unrestrained by boundaries. It is he, in his marriage, who at last brings the indigenous Maori community into view, for there has been a yawning gap in these texts, no Jebusites, no Maoris in sight, except the latter vaguely in the distance. It is Duncan's part Maori great-great-grandson, the grandson of the child Maria cared for, who, at the close of the novel, provides a fresh sense of hope. As she watches this child, who turns from the window smashing to make amends, Maria "sensed the vitality. He was his own person. A new kind of person… He would make new choices."[48] The window has been broken; there are new choices, the world is larger than McLeod, and closed settler communities.

Although reading such a complex novel alongside a very brief biblical episode seems a case of comparing the incomparable and even incompatible, the detour has brought facets of both into sharper focus. I return to David Gunn's statement about "serious entertainment" challenging an audience's "intellect, their emotions, their understanding of people, of society, and of themselves." Have I been challenged in my reading of the David and Michal narrative? Have I been persuaded that Michal is the Saulide blot on the Davidic landscape that must be removed? Should I have taken more notice of Gunn's conclusion that "what becomes clear…is that if there is a particular political *Tendenz* in the narrative *it is by no means clear what it is*"?[49] I realize that I have seen Michal as I have sensed the narrator has wanted me to see her, that if Kidman had been the narrator I might have seen a Michal actively making choices from her place behind the window of the text.

Perhaps, too, I should have paid more attention to the window motif itself, for windows frequently function as symbols of that "dangerous or liminal space between life and death."[50] That is clearly how the window functioned in the *The House of Secrets*.[51] Certainly death framed the arrival of the ark, entering with the shadow of Uzzah, just as it has closed the chapter, quite literally with Michal's death as its last word. But what of the "liminal space" that moves towards life? Is this where Lefebvre's third category of "lived" space, described as "an essential terrain of struggle on the way to realising ourselves as 'total persons,'"[52] is helpful? I realize that the narrator would have me miss that possibility for

48. Kidman, *The House of Secrets*, 274.

49. Gunn, *The Story of King David*, 23.

50. Bodi, *The Michal Affair*, 25.

51. See ibid., 42–44, for a survey of the varying symbolism of the "woman at the window" motif.

52. Shields, *Love and Struggle*,164.

Michal, keeping me within the polarizing categories of centre and margin, with the focus firmly directed upon the Davidic centre. But as bell hooks indicates, centres and margins are not so simply kept apart. She writes of the Afro-American experience as being frequently one of living on the margins and working in the centre, resulting in looking "both from the outside in and from the inside out."[53] Is there a sense of that complexity here? Michal, as David's wife and Saul's daughter, knew both the margins and the centre, indeed had long known both. Kidman and hooks prod me to recognize that I should have been more aware of the view looking out from inside the window; I might then have glimpsed an ambitious David "as seen from the house of Saul."[54] I might also have remembered how Saul, himself, reacted strongly against a similar celebration, at David's victorious return in 1 Sam 18:6.

Perhaps, too, I have misread the narrator. I have been assuming that he was a pro-David advocate, but it may be that his was a carefully devised counter-story, that he, too, was an "Other" player, deftly encoding another viewing of the scene. I now wonder whether Michal's omission of the divine name was a deliberate move on the narrator's part: that it was not only Michal, as a traditional daughter of Saul, but he himself who considered that David's supposedly religious act was not at all appropriate in Israel.[55] Perhaps even the ark itself was to be understood differently. For if this was a Davidic introduction, and not part of Saul's, and, by implication, Israel's piety, then it would and should have been quite appropriately viewed with suspicion.[56] I now realize too that I have missed the full significance of the placing of Michal's contemptuous disdain. Set between the dancing and leaping David of vv. 14–15 and the

53. Quoted by Soja, *Thirdspace*, 100, as an example of "thirdspace consciousness."

54. Joel Rosenberg, *King and Kin: Political Allegory in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 117.

55. Bodi, *The Michal Affair*, 48, suggests this may represent "the view of Yahwistic circles which were uncomfortable with the religious syncretism" seeing this dancing as all too similar to the dancing of other nations before their gods. Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 250, acknowledges that both positive and negative interpretations are possible: "At the negative extreme, it is suggested that David participated in a Canaanite ecstatic dance that became something of an orgy… The narrative invites such probes, but gives us little clue about David's intention." Rosenstock, *David's Play*, 74, suggests that not only is Michal's taunt directed to the contrast between David's inappropriate self-exposure and YHWH's bodily hiddeness, but that she assumes that "YHWH's glory is associated with his [unseen] phallic power."

56. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons*, 333.

arrival and placing of the ark in v. 17, it comes as an interruption and disturbance to the flow of the narrative, just as her vocal challenge deconstructively unsettles David's concluding act of blessing with its offerings and gifts. But it is David's final sentence in v. 20 that unsettles the picture of the "pious" king. Michal's accusation has been on target: the concern of the king of Israel is indeed his own honour. The words "before YHWH" may have framed David's words in v. 21, but his talk here is wholly of being honoured himself. If the narrative presents itself as the bearer of a pro-Davidic ideology, a space has been opened up for questioning this. Set against its immediate context and read in line with Kidman, Lefebvre and hooks, Michal's challenge invites a dynamic debate about absolute rule, about the co-opting of the divine, and the rights of those who challenge and resist.

As always, others before me have read this narrative "both from the outside in and from the inside out," and, as always, have come to differing conclusions.[57] And perhaps that is as it should be; different readings offer different views, which is the very nature of reading. Read alongside and through the lens of *The House of Secrets*, 2 Sam 6:12b–23 brings a hope that dominating powers do not have the last word, that there is always another view through the window. It is this openness, this refusal to see the world in terms of binary opposition that Soja terms "Thirding-as-Othering." The participial forms convey the sense of movement, of a process of "disordering, deconstruction, and tentative reconstitution."[58] It is a process without closure, a process of questioning engagement, that notices the gaps and the peripheries that suddenly and unexpectedly intrude to challenge all simplistic oppositions. Just as it opens up the text

57. Bodi, *The Michal Affair*, for example, sees the writer "us[ing] the story of the tragic fate of a royal princess in order to denounce the abuses that the monarchic institution introduced into Israelite society" (p. 144), so that "Michal's tragedy foreshadows that of the Israelite monarchy and underpins the negative assessment of this institution made by the Deuteronomic historiographers" (p. 5). Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist*, however, suggests a reading that looks to a more positive future; Michal may represent an "ideal Israel that never was," a counter to the Israel that asked for a king other than their own kingly God: "Michal's childlessness may represent the Deuteronomist's hope that the glory would one day return to Israel, and that Israel, like Michal, would remain kingless before the LORD to the day of her death" (p. 71).

58. Soja, *Thirdspace*, 61. This connects with Lefebvre's third category of *l'espace vécu*, for, as Shields notes, "his project is to locate the revolutionary potential lying within the 'lived' as a deep motivation to utopian change" (*Lefebvre, Love and Struggle*, 166).

to become a freshly spoken word, so, too, we, as readers, are "constantly made and remade,"[59] each time seeing the world a little differently. Such reading is serious entertainment indeed.

It is a privilege to contribute to this volume in honour of David Gunn, scholar, friend and mentor, all of which should be writ large in capital letters.

59. George Aichele and Gary A. Phillips, "Introduction: Exegesis, Eisegesis, Intergesis," *Semeia* 69/70 (1995): 7–18 (10).

DAVID W[E]AVES*

Jione Havea

Imagine this.[1]

All day, at the center of the inner room, David stretches out on his new couch, consumed by no one knows what,[2] as attendants poise to serve him nuts, juice, sweets, fanning, and whatever else for which he might wave. When he raises a finger, the attendants leap to offer him their services. And when he waves the attendants away, they would draw

* This reading is encircled with appeals to the working of the imagination which I often hear, usually accompanied with chuckles and inviting smiles, from my teacher and friend David M. Gunn, for whom this essay waves and salutes, in appreciation. The work on this essay was supported by a grant from the Australian Research Theology Foundation, and the research assistance of Seforosa Carroll.

1. The imagination is a threshold that opens toward consciousness, embodiment and performance. The imagination is a wave that also weaves (Victoria Rue, "Bodied Knowledge: Theatre as a Pedagogical Tool for Religious Studies and Theology," *ARTS: The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies* 15 [2003]: 29–33). "A consciousness which is closed to alternating views and perceptions must nowadays be considered a dead consciousness. It works, without being creative. This means being vulnerable to the pain that comes through opening up, regarding openness higher than security. A flowing perception leaves me in contact, without any final results. It is like a dancer who finds his [*sic*] balance again and again without actually ever 'having' it" (Peter Erlenwein, "Bibliorama: A Modern Body–Mind Hermeneutics," *Asia Journal of Theology* 16, no. 2 [2002]: 327). This chapter surfs upon the currents of several works that emerge from the confluence of the Bible with popular and media cultures. See, for instance, Martin O'Kane, ed., *Borders, Boundaries and the Bible* (JSOTSup 313; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002); George Aichele and Richard Walsh, eds., *Screening Scripture: Intertextual Connections between Scripture and Film* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity International, 2002); Robert M. Fowler, Edith Blumhofer and Fernando D. Segovia, eds., *New Paradigms for Bible Study: The Bible in the Third Millennium* (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004); and Fiona C. Black, ed., *The Recycled Bible: Autobiography, Culture, and the Space Between* (Semeia Studies; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006).

2. Joseph Heller, *God Knows* (New York: Knopf, 1984).

back. David did not need to say much. A point and a wave would bring comfort and pleasure in the palms of his servants, or in their withdrawal. Those are some of the rewards of being a king.[3]

To David's right side, closer to the entry, as if to serve as a barrier, slumps Joab, adrift in fleeting thoughts. Attendants tried to cool him down also, but the warmth of the afternoon got the better of his heavier self. Joab nods and doses, and sags, but David does not seem to notice. Two men close in privileges, in the same room, yet so far apart.

To David's left side, toward the back of the room, as if to stay out of the way, were on-duty advisers, chroniclers and eunuchs. Like the weavers of Oceania,[4] these men uphold David in their gazes and weave him with Joab into the memories of the nation. They also shave the strands of stories they receive and clip their loose ends.

In the outer room, and overflowing into the veranda, huddle palace officials, waiting for summons from the king or from Joab. As they linger, soaking in the heat of the afternoon, they distract one another by gossiping about this and that, revisiting events and memories that ripple from the past. Attendants keep the inner room of the king cool; stories vent the outer room of the officials, lower in the circle of sovereignty and the whirlpool of status.

Through the veranda, overflowing into the court and adjoining quarters, and as far as the palace gate, servants buzz and flow, appearing to work, though their ears were keenly pricked to the stories that murmur around them. Now and then, the recalling of a story would be *moving* enough that it breaks down the barriers between adjoining rooms and bordering courts, and associates the people from different circles within the confines of the king's palace. A moving story opens limits and draws listeners into attention, and into one another. A moving story also pulls other stories unto and under its whitewash.

The story of Bathsheba is one such moving story, a story with many currents, about a woman with (non-Israelite?) waves whirling from her glide,[5] a wavy character, and a heck of a weaver. Her story imagines an event many moons before the storied afternoon I am imagining herein. It is so moving a story that it breaks me, also, into its own limits; nay, it is

3. See also Leonhard Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David* (trans. Michael D. Rutter and David M. Gunn; Sheffield: Almond, 1982).

4. Lydia Johnson and Joan A. Filemoni-Tofaeono, eds., *Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania* (Suva: South Pacific Association of Theological Schools & Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, 2003).

5. Beverly W. Cushman, "The Politics of the Royal Harem and the Case of Bat-Sheba," *JSOT* 30 (2006): 327–43 (336–37).

so moving that I am ripped by its currents. Does it matter? Stories have power.[6] And storytellers have the itch to tell, for the sake of the memories, and the opportunity to tell differently, for the sake of vulnerable characters in previous retellings and for the sake of the coming generations. Storytelling can shift limits and reconfigure stories, and invite storytellers to roam in several worlds, upon one story unto the next, weaving real and storied, imagined and interweaving, memories.[7]

All afternoon, Bathsheba was on the lips of the gossiping officials. Drawn by the memory of her being escorted into the inner room of David—through the gazes and whispers of previous officials and servants[8]—these latter-day officials gather toward the outside wall of the outer court. In silence, remembering the stir on Bathsheba's face after David gave her the wave and she walked out through the stare of a gasping crowd, these latter officials moved away from the ears of the two men of status, David and Joab. The moving story of a woman draws these men away from their leaders.

As in other afternoons, the officials lean against the wall, as if they wanted to keep an eye on the roof of the palace, where David often appears at that time of the afternoon. Then two officials step forward to recall and rethink about Bathsheba, one official serving as a straightforward and orderly narrator while the second serves as an uninhibited and imaginative storyteller.[9] This kind of event was almost a daily affair, at around the same time of the afternoon.

As usual, the narrator and the storyteller launch the story, and the gossiping men join in with details to navigate the storytelling event along the sea of stories in which they live.[10] In those days, storytelling was a

6. Yairah Amit, "The Power of Stories," in *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 1–9.

7. See, for example, Archie C. C. Lee, "Doing Theology in Chinese Context: The David–Bathsheba Story and the Parable of Nathan," *East Asia Journal of Theology* 3, no. 2 (1985): 243–57.

8. Julie Kelso, "Gazing at Impotence in Henry King's *David and Bathsheba*," in Aichele and Walsh, *Screening Scripture*, 155–87.

9. I distinguish the narrator, who upholds the flow of the biblical narrative, from the storyteller, who encourages the story to develop beyond the control of the text. Whereas the narrator tells a structured narrative, the storyteller remembers a flowing story. The storyteller dwells in the opportunity to interrupt the direction of the narrator and resists the grain of his narrative (Danna N. Fewell, *The Children of Israel: Reading the Bible for the Sake of Our Children* [Nashville: Abingdon, 2003], 32–36).

10. A story drifts in a sea of stories, tempting its retelling to divert and dip into other stories and their currents of memories.

cooperative effort that was not for the primary purpose of sharing information. Storytelling was an event where people find meanings, identities and realities. So it was common for a story to transform in each retelling, to ebb and flow, for much depends on how the listeners chart the course of the story. On this occasion, the narrator sets the storytelling event in motion:[11]

Narrator: At the turn of the year, the season when kings go out…[12]

Storyteller: Wait up, Mr. Narrator.[13] What is this business about kings going out? Go out from where? From their throne rooms? From their palaces? From their lands? Go out where? To do what? When was the last time you saw our king go out?

Chronicler: Wait up yourself, storyteller. Don't interrupt the narrator and do not doubt him, for he is a source of information for the royal record keepers. We have decided that the event in question happened during "the season when kings go out." We won't explain from or to where, or why. We will simply say "kings go out," *period.* Do you want us to say more than that?

Storyteller: Well, some of the elders in our streets do. They say that this story is about kings going out to do battle, to fight other kings and nations.[14] But others say that they don't really go out looking for war. War happens when they cross the land of other kings.

Scribe: This is why we must control the way future generations remember our blessed memories. God forbids that future scribes will give a purpose to why kings go out and people would assume that kings only go out to do battle.

Storyteller: Our people have experienced the wrath of kings. So it is easy to believe what our elders say. There must surely be other reasons why kings go out.

Arm-bearer: That's right. Some go to explore and claim unoccupied lands.

11. The walls separating storytelling, enactment and drama fall in this chapter. See also Wanda Vassallo, "Drama in the Church: A Match for Postmodernity," *Clergy Journal* (November–December 2005): 14–16; Erlenwein, "Bibliodrama," 327–40; Anthony G. Reddie, "A Contextualized Approach to Black British Theology by Means of Dramatic Engagement," *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 2 (2005): 11–30; Anthony G. Reddie, *Dramatizing Theologies: A Participative Approach to Black God-Talk* (London: Equinox, 2006).

12. The phrases with underlining are from NJPS (1999).

13. Storytelling in South Sea Islands circles involves interruptions and redirections, and is often conversational. Listeners participate in the retelling of stories, filling in the gaps and sometimes redirecting the story away from the intention of the narrator and teller. Listeners are tellers also.

14. See also Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "'Off with His Head': David, Uriah, and Bathsheba," in her *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken, 2002), 146–56.

Charioteer: Down low and over yonder.

Priest: Some go seeking guidance and direction.

Eunuch: Other kings go out to relax, if you get my drift.

Storyteller: I like the idea that the recorders do not intend to limit the reasons why kings go out but instead leave things open, as if to invite our children to decide what reasons to give to the going out of the kings.

Treasurer: They intend to leave the story ambiguous?[15] What a great idea. I should do the same.

Chronicler: No matter how our sons explain why kings go out, the account that we are weaving will not validate them.

Scribe: Let's not waste any more time on this then. Let the narrator continue his holey… I mean, holy…story.

Narrator: …[at] the season when kings go out, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him, and they devastated Ammon and besieged Rabbah; David [on the other hand] remained in Jerusalem.

David: {*From the rooftop, where he has been for God knows how long, waving to interrupt the conversation and to draw attention to himself*} Before you ask why I did not go out like the other kings, but remained in Jerusalem instead, let me explain. Joab…

Joab: {*Having stirred in the inner room, almost like Boas on the threshing floor, he followed David's voice to the roof as if he has been summoned*} Hinneni. I am here.

Sweeper: {*Whispering to his fellow worker*} Who's he?

Wiper: That is the chief in command of the troops, the most vicious defender of his majesty, our lord King David of Judah, anointed servant of Yhwh.

David: Joab led the troops against Ammon because of what King Hanun did to my courtiers.[16] Hanun was the king of Ammon, and Joab went to avenge the shame he brought on us. It started like this: I had a good relationship with Hanun's father, king Nahash. When Nahash died, I sent messengers to give my condolences to Hanun. I did this in good faith, and a matter of international policy to pay respect to the life of a king. And do you know what that…that…that boy did?

Joab: Your majesty, let me handle this. It was so embarrassing. Hanun ordered his troops to capture my messengers, clip one side of their beards, cut off half of their garments around the buttocks

15. "Ambiguity is, after all, the spice of biblical narrative, without which everything would be cut, dried and most certainly insipid" (George G. Nicol, "The Alleged Rape of Bathsheba: Some Observations on Ambiguity in Biblical Narrative," *JSOT* 73 [1997]: 43–54 [44]).

16. The negative attitude toward the Ammonites extends back to the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters (Gen 19:30–38). The Ammonites are descendants of Benammi, son of Lot and his younger daughter.

area {*pointing to his behind*}, then sent them back to Jerusalem. It was *so* very embarrassing. So David gave orders for the men to stop in Jericho until their beards grow back; as you all know, a half-shaved beard is embarrassing and insulting.

Crowd: {*Mumbling in agreement*} We know!

David: Hanun greatly embarrassed the messengers and Joab's men, and offended me. When he heard that I was really mad, he hired a neighboring nation to stand alongside him in case I sent the troops to attack him. What do you expect me to do? Do you think I would let him have the last laugh?

Joab: No! No! No! We are the people of God, and to offend us is to insult God also. We must protect the honor of God. We must fight ungodly people.[17]

Crowd: {*Roaring in support*} Damn the ungodly people.

Sweeper: {*Whispering to his mate*} I can't say that.

Wiper: Why not?

Sweeper: I can't say that either.

David: {*Raising his voice*} *That* is why I sent Joab and the troops to devastate Lebanon. My men crossed over to Lebanon…

Joab: Excuse me your majesty but we are talking about Ammon, not Lebanon.[18]

David: Oops, Lebanon was another time. What I meant to say was…my men crossed over to Ammon to defend the honor of God.

Joab: That's right!

David: Why am I defending myself to you lot? {*Giving the men the wave, and he returns to the inner room*}

Joab: Go on with your storytelling. {*He follows David inside*}

Polisher: {*Softly to his friends*} Did you notice that David did not explain why he did not go out?

Sweeper: I don't get it.

Wiper: Oh, just leave it.

* * *

Narrator: Late one afternoon, David rose from his couch and strolled on the roof of the royal palace.

Storyteller: {*Lowering his voice*} So he did go out! From his couch onto the roof, like just now. But before leaving his couch, what was he thinking about? Was he reflecting on national affairs? Family matters? Personal affairs? Bodily stuff? Couch stuff?

Eunuch: There are couches, and there are couches.

17. John I. Lawlor, "Theology and Art in the Narrative of the Ammonite War (2 Samuel 10–12)," *Grace Theological Journal* 3, no. 2 (1982): 193–205.

18. Historical slippages are common in storytelling events, as stories are told within contexts that are open for stories to interweave.

Storyteller: Was he tired and frustrated when he walked onto the roof? Or excited and vigorous? What was he looking for?

Scribe: Stop interrupting. Let the narrator continue.

Narrator: Late one afternoon, David rose from his couch and strolled on the roof of the royal palace, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing.[19]

Storyteller: {*Pretending he hasn't heard the story before*} He what? He peeped?[20]

Chronicler: Recall that David went onto the roof late in the afternoon. It must have been dark already. It had to be dark for the woman to bathe in the nude.

Eunuch: Who said that she was nude? The narrator did not say that she was naked. He only said that the woman was bathing. Don't you know that some folks bathe without undressing? Stop undressing the woman for you are seeing more than what David saw in the story.[21]

Sweeper: {*Softly to his friends*} Sounds to me that this one refuses to see what David saw, if you know what I mean.

Polisher: Be careful friend. They might suspect that you are a foreigner.

Sweeper: My friend…I am one of you.

Polisher: In the palace, nothing is private.

Sweeper: But some parts are private.

Wiper: You do get it!

Scribe: Shhh…

* * *

Narrator: The woman was very beautiful, and the king sent someone to make inquiries about the woman.

Bathsheba: {*Appearing from the queen's window*} Let me tell you.

Adviser: Your majesty, it is best not to be seduced by this storytelling event. After all, madam, this story is not about you.

19. Repetition and supplementing are key elements in storytelling events. The narrator repeats what was said earlier and at the same time adds new information.

20. Spying is not uncommon in the story of Israel, from the spying of foreign land (e.g. Gen 19; Num 13; and Josh 2), to the spying of, inquiring into, the spiritual realms through rituals and divination (cf. Num 22–24; 1 Sam 28:3–25; and 1 Kgs 18:17–40). The Garden story, where YHWH goes looking for Adam and Eve, and later comes in response to the blood of Abel, is sort of a spying story too.

21. Artists too, including Rembrandt, Sebastiano Ricci, Willen Drost and many others, contribute toward undressing Bathsheba in the minds of readers. See David M. Gunn, "Bathsheba Goes Bathing in Hollywood: Words, Images, and Social Locations," *Semeia* 74 (1996): 75–101; and J. Cheryl Exum, "Bathsheba Plotted, Shot, and Painted," in her *Plotted, Shot and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (JSOTSup 215; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 19–53.

Chronicler: That's right, this is the story of David, the anointed—the messiah—king of Yhwh.

Bathsheba: But I am the woman in the story, the one whom your anointed king spied.

Storyteller: She has a point. The narrator spied on her too. He saw her beauty, almost like the tree in the garden which was a delight to the eyes of Eve.[22]

Scribe: And there is that other tree behind which Susanna was intimate with her lover.

Crowd: What?

Scribe: Never mind.

Chronicler: Stop interrupting. Wait for the report from the messenger that the king sent to inquire about the beautiful woman.

Narrator: …the king sent someone to make inquiries about the woman. He reported,

Messenger: She is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, wife of Uriah the Hittite.

Bathsheba: That would be me.

Adviser: But this is not your story, madam.

Narrator: David sent messengers to fetch her; she came to him and he lay with her—she had just purified herself after her period—and she went back home.

Storyteller: Wait a minute. David was told that Bathsheba was married, yet he took her? Who the…did David think he was?

Chronicler: Your questions are irritating. Why don't you relax and absorb the words of the narrator?

Storyteller: Do you mean, relax and accept *your* story? The narrator tells the story for your interests and on behalf of your messiah, but the story involves other people. I am not a Judean, and I am more interested in the story of the daughter of Eliam who is married to the Hittite man.[23] Let her speak.

Bathsheba: David's inquiry about me was done without the knowledge or permission of my husband, nor the blessings of my father. My husband was at the battle of the king, with Joab…

Adviser: Leave Joab out of this. He was in the field so he did not know the details of what was going on in the palace. This story is not about Joab, madam.

Bathsheba: It is not your story either. As I was saying, the messengers came and spoke to me without the permission of my husband or my

22. "Nothing has happened, but our attention has been arrested: we too look at this woman. We cannot see her, but David alerts and causes us to wonder about her. What does she look like? What is she wearing? Is she naked? Why is she there?" (Frymer-Kensky, *Reading*, 144).

23. People of the South Seas are slowly realizing that biblical stories are not our stories, as we have been brainwashed by missionaries and Bible pushers. As we become more conscious of the foreignness of the Bible to our cultures, we consequently become more critical of the Bible and the way it has been used.

father. You all know my father, Eliam, son of Ahitophel the counselor.[24] Don't talk about me as if I am an empty woman.

Crowd: {*Silence*}

Bathsheba: I come from a respected family, and my beauty was no secret.

Crowd: {*Silence*}

Bathsheba: When the messenger summoned me, I thought that it had to do with my husband. Instead, the king came into me and lay with me. He sent messengers to fetch me, and at the end of the afternoon, I went home alone as if I came on my own design.

Storyteller: What do you mean?

Bathsheba: David's men came to fetch me, and after he unloaded his royal desire, and anointed me with his messianic body, I returned home alone as if I was a discarded nobody. Don't you think it would have been appropriate to give me an escort? What do you think those people at the gate were saying when I, a married woman, daughter of a counselor, walked past them with my head lowered, coming from the court of the king, looking like a violated woman? Huh? What do you think?[25]

Storyteller: The narrator said that *you came to* David. It feels as if you had something up your sleeve, madam. What was going on?

Bathsheba: {*Stuttering*} Uh…hmm…ah…ooh…as I was saying, when the men came to inquire, I thought it had to do with Uriah my husband so I came to David to find out what was going on. My father raised me to trust the king, and to attend to his needs.

Treasurer: Save your musings for another time. The story gets better. Let the narrator continue.

* * *

Narrator: The woman conceived, and she sent word to David…

Bathsheba: I am pregnant.[26]

Storyteller: Wow! You've skipped over lots of happenings, and time, Mr. Narrator. But, never mind.

24. Assuming that they are the same characters as in 2 Sam 23:34 (Frymer-Kensky, *Reading*). If Bathsheba was the granddaughter of the same Ahitophel, there is a vengeful twist to Ahitophel's advice in 2 Sam 16:20–23 that Absalom sleeps with his father David's concubines.

25. "To say that Bathsheba set out to entice the king is to say that violated women 'were asking for it' because they smiled, or wore tight clothes, or went to a club. Bathsheba is enjoying a private moment—she thinks—and we violate it the moment we stop to complete her beauty" (Frymer-Kensky, *Reading*, 144–45).

26. A moving storytelling event can break down resistance and draw people into its worlds. A moving storytelling event opens up boundaries. In this case, Bathsheba, as David and Joab were imagined earlier, joins the storytelling event as a character and a commentator.

Narrator: Thereupon David sent a message to Joab… {*looking up to the roof to see if David was there*} …Send Uriah the Hittite to me.[27]

Narrator: {*Continuing*} And Joab sent Uriah to David.

Storyteller: Pause there for a minute, narrator sir. David made Bathsheba pregnant then he sent for Uriah…what's going on?

Bathsheba: Don't forget that I was purifying myself after my period when David spied from the roof. I was not pregnant when David took me, so I was surely carrying David's baby.

Eunuch: The narrator assured us that Bathsheba had her period. But should we also assume that she did not sleep with someone else just before, or soon after, David took her?

Bathsheba: I don't sleep around, like you men, thank you very much.

Eunuch: Be that as it might be, do not forget that as a woman your words stand not a chance in hell against the good image of the king.

Storyteller: What good image are you talking about? The king was quick to send for Uriah, giving me the impression that he was guilty of something. You seem to be covering something up, my dear Eunuch.

Eunuch: Women folk mess the story up. Why don't you let our omniscient narrator finish his story?[28]

Polisher: {*Softly*} Hey friend, does your wife have a ritual bath after her period?

Sweeper: No, not really. But she usually washes after sex. During her period, we don't do it. But whenever we do it, she usually washes afterwards.

Polisher: Interesting. My wife is the same.

Sweeper: Do you mean that Bathsheba was washing…because…after…before…when David saw her?

Wiper: You are getting it.

* * *

Narrator: When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab and the troops were faring and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah… {*looks up again, but David was still not on the roof*} …Go down to your house and bathe your feet!

27. The story of Tamar and Judah (Gen 38) comes to mind, especially the revelation of Tamar's pregnancy and the way Judah tried to get rid of her. David's enquiry about Bathsheba and his later fetching of Uriah echo Judah sending Hirah to retrieve his pledge from the woman (Tamar).

28. To say that the narrator is omniscient is not to say that the narrator knows everything that happened in and around the story world. Being omniscient simply means that the narrator knows something about what happen in several places, as if he was present in the court of David, in the battle field, at the entrance to the palace, as well as at the home of Bathsheba. Moreover, being omniscient does not mean that the narrator was innocent or that s/he will tell everything s/he knows

Polisher: {*Whispering to his mates*} We all know which feet he was talking about.

Sweeper: Huh? Do you mean the same feet that Auntie Ruth uncovered?

Scribe: Shhh!

Arm-bearer: If you have gone to war, or return from a long journey, you would understand the need to wash your feet. This foreigner was in the battle and he just arrived from a long journey. His feet needed a good wash.

Storyteller: I suspect David had something else in mind. Why didn't he order one of his maidservants to wash Uriah's feet? There are several washing areas in the palace. David was not talking about his walking feet.

Narrator: When Uriah left the royal palace, a present from the king followed him. But Uriah slept at the entrance of the royal palace,[29] along with the other officers of his lord, and did not go down to his house. When David was told that Uriah had not gone down to his house, he said to Uriah… {*again he checks, but David is still not on the roof*} …You just came from a journey; why didn't you go down to your house?

Storyteller: So the king wanted Uriah to go home and sleep with his wife. That's what "washing your feet" means.

Chronicler: You are really irritating, Madam Storyteller.

Crowd: {*Laughter*}

Storyteller: I am not a woman. I am a eunuch.

Chronicler: Did it not occur to you that there may have been issues at home? Uriah has been gone for a while, and maybe he was too tired to see his wife?

Eunuch: Or maybe his orientation has changed?

Storyteller: You two seem to have issues with women.

Scribe: Leave them alone.

Storyteller: It is interesting that Uriah slept at the entrance of the royal palace, with other officers who might have seen Bathsheba leave the king's palace. I suspect that he stopped to find out what went on while he was away, and he learned that his Bathsheba came to the palace. Feeling betrayed, and angry, Uriah spends the night there instead of going home.

Chronicler: There is no room for speculation here. Let the narrator continue.

Narrator: Uriah answered David…

Uriah's uncle: The Ark and Israel and Judah are located at Succoth, and my master Joab and your Majesty's men are camped in the open; how can I go home and eat and drink and sleep with my wife? As you live, by your very life, I will not do this!

Storyteller: Uriah figured things out. The king was trying to get him to sleep with his wife; the king must be trying to cover something up.

29. Cf. Esth 4:1–2.

Narrator: David said to Uriah… {*following the same routine of looking up to the roof to see if David was standing there*} …Stay here today also, and tomorrow I will send you off.

Sweeper: {*Softly to his friends*} Why is the narrator nervous?

Polisher: Feels like he knows more than he is telling us.

Narrator: So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. The next day, David summoned him, and he ate and drank with him until he got him drunk; but in the evening, [Uriah] went out to sleep in the same place, with his lord's officers; he did not go down to his home.

* * *

Arm-bearer: We discipline our men to stand and fall together, to be supportive of one another whether they are in the battle field or at home. We put a lot of emphasis on "company" and we are dedicated to our king and to our God. We are the army of the Most High God—YHWH—the LORD of Hosts.

Storyteller: Ah, huh! Boys will always be boys. You fight and sleep together. God forbids that I should ask what you do when you sleep together.

Eunuch: Is there an opening in the army for me?

Chronicler: Nonsense! Uriah and the officers slept together at a very public place. They slept there to protect the king. They are dedicated men who observe their duties to the fullest.

Uriah's uncle: Well, that's not always true. We are devoted to God and country, for sure, but not always for the king and his army. We are neither innocent nor naïve always. We have personal interests that we hold and nurture. We are capable of rebelling.

Messenger: I was upset when Uriah did not accept the king's gifts. Instead, he went and slept with those men at the entrance. It was okay the first time. But the second time felt like he was publicly resisting the king.

Storyteller: Why were other officers at the entrance? Did they come for the same reasons as Uriah? Did they come to be in solidarity with one another?

Messenger: That's not important. The main thing here is that a man was resisting the authority of the king. Rebellion is good.

Sweeper: {*To his friends*} Three cheers for Uriah.[30]

Wiper: Bullshit!

Sweeper: What's wrong with you?

Wiper: What would you do if you found out that your wife is pregnant with another man's baby?

Sweeper: Well, I would do what Judah ordered for Tamar: I would stone her to death.

30. Cf. John Kessler, "Sexuality and Politics: The Motif of the Displaced Husband in the Books of Samuel," *CBQ* 62 (2000): 409–23 (419).

Wiper: Can't you see?
Sweeper: What?
Wiper: David sent Uriah home so that he might find out that Bathsheba was pregnant and so get rid of her.
Sweeper: Smart man!

* * *

Storyteller: Are we assuming that Bathsheba did not have personal interests? Was she forced to come to the palace of David or did she willingly come?[31]
Bathsheba: Who could refuse the king's desire?
Eunuch: I had a strange feeling about this woman. From the very beginning, she acted as if she was trying to take over the king's story.
Storyteller: Was *the story* all that Bathsheba wanted? Did she want more than just the story? Did she also want the throne?
Eunuch: But she is a woman. She can't be king. God forbids.
Storyteller: But she can make a king.[32]
Polisher: {*Whispering to his friends*} And we know that she can do the king too.

* * *

Narrator: In the morning, David wrote a letter to Joab, which he sent with Uriah. He wrote in the letter as follows: Place Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest; then fall back so that he may be killed!
Messenger: Did he really mean that?
David: {*Waving from the roof*} Yes!
Scribe: So it shall be remembered.
Chronicler: Oh, no![33]
Storyteller: Imagine that!

31. Nicol, "Alleged Rape of Bathsheba."
32. Cf. 1 Kgs 1–2.
33. This episode is not recorded in Chronicles. See also Karel A. Steenbrink, "Reading the Bible Together with Muslims: David as Sinner King and Repentant Prophet," *Exchange* 35, no. 4 (2006): 347–59.

Indexes

Index of References

Hebrew Bible/
Old Testament
Genesis
4 107
6–9 107
9:21 72
17 73
18:14 100
19 107, 295
19:30–38 293
19:33–35 72
20:9 168
22 16, 246
24 43
24:67 268
26:8 276
26:29 50
28:21 50
29:18 268
32 43
34 39
38 298
39:6 69
42:2 168
44:17 50

Exodus
4:18 50
4:22 121
4:24–26 73
5:16 168
12:30 17
12:35 196
15 32
15:13 32
15:17 32
15:20–21 140
16:31 49
21:12–14 171
22:21 41
23:9 41
32:6 276

Leviticus
4:22–26 170
10 17
24:15–18 17
24:17–21 171

Numbers
11:8 49
13 295
13:22 36
22–24 295
35:30–34 171
35:33 171

Deuteronomy
1:16 41
8:18–20 98
14:22–29 171
24:1–4 265, 268
24:17 41
30:20 98
31:19–22 141
32:6 121

Joshua
2 295
3–5 26
3:5 77
5:2–9 73
7:13 77
15:14 36

Judges
1:10 36
5 44
9:4 279
11:3 279
17 107
19 107

Ruth
1:16–17 69
4:17 268

1 Samuel
1–15 3
1–3 107
1:14 73
1:17 50
2:18 114
2:20 17
2:25 168
3 79
3:17 76
4 17
4:21 273
5:9 148
5:11 148
7 76
7:1–17 114
7:8 76
7:11 76

7:13 148
8 76
8:19–20 118
8:22 76
9–10 71
9:22–24 77
9:24–10:1 77
10:5 137
12:15 148
13 77, 125
13:1 124
13:3 26
13:14 203
14:24 49
14:43 49
14:49 260, 267
15 77, 129, 148
16–17 136
16 71, 77, 136, 242
16:1–13 135, 138
16:1 76
16:5 77
16:6–7 136
16:7–8 116
16:7 78
16:8–9 78
16:10–11 34
16:10 77
16:11 78
16:12 78, 136
16:13–14 110
16:13 78
16:14–23 135, 151
16:14 137
16:16 212, 216
16:18 111, 136
16:20 145
16:21 76, 112
16:23 138, 212, 216
17 74, 136, 138
17:4–7 74
17:17–18 145
17:26 73
17:36 73
17:42 112
17:46 151
17:51 74, 151
17:53 145
17:57 151
18 260
18:1–5 221
18:1 112, 266
18:3–4 266
18:3 112
18:6 286
18:10–11 219
18:10 80, 216
18:17 74, 261
18:20–28 260
18:20 72, 268
18:21 72
18:22 76
18:27 72, 267
19–20 242
19 72, 80, 161, 249
19:1–7 221
19:1 75, 76, 112
19:8–17 160
19:9 216
19:10 79
19:11–17 260, 277
19:11 267
19:12 79
19:17 79
19:18 79
19:20–24 141, 216
19:20 79
19:23 79
19:24 81
19:25 260
19:44 260
20 266
20:1 79, 81
20:4 112
20:13 50
20:17 112
20:29 79
20:30 56, 63
20:42 50
21 161, 244
21:1 79
21:10–15 Eng 159
21:11–16 159
21:11 79
22:1 40, 159
22:2 40
22:20 28
23 40, 159, 161, 266
23:6–12 28
23:13 40
23:17 112
23:19–28 159
23:19 160
23:24–29 40
23:29 159
24 40, 160, 243, 247
24:1 159
24:12 33
24:40–42 52
25 13, 38, 40, 43, 50, 52, 53, 112, 246, 249
25:1 40
25:2 38
25:3 40, 42
25:6–8 39
25:6 43
25:8 41
25:9 41
25:10 41
25:11 41, 46
25:12 42
25:13 42
25:15 46
25:17 42, 45
25:18 41, 50
25:19 43, 70
25:21–22 43

1 Samuel (cont.)
25:22 50, 51
25:23 42, 43
25:24 44
25:25 44
25:26 45, 46, 51
25:27 46
25:28–31 47
25:28 47, 48
25:29 47
25:30 48
25:31 48
25:32–34 49
25:32–33 49
25:34 49–51
25:35 49
25:36 50
25:37–38 47
25:37 51
25:38 48, 51, 246
25:39 51
25:40 51
25:41 39, 52
25:42 42
25:43 52
25:44 260, 277
26 40, 159–61, 243, 248
26:1 160
27–29 242
27 249
28:3–25 295
30 249
31 5, 74
31:4 73
31:9 151

2 Samuel
1 7, 8, 74, 248, 266
1:1 5
1:5 5
1:9 6
1:10 6
1:12 6
1:13 6
1:16 6
1:20 73
1:26 75, 220, 221
2–4 10, 245
2:4–7 113
2:7 113
2:8–32 113
2:10 113
2:11 113
2:23 35
3 7
3:6–16 265
3:12–21 113
3:12–17 260
3:13–15 114, 277
3:13–14 261
3:14 267
3:16 278
3:19 113
3:21–23 7
3:24–25 8
3:26 7
3:27 7
3:30 8
3:31–33 8
3:36–37 8
4 9
4:8 9, 151
4:10–11 10
5 242
5:1–3 113
5:3 279
5:5 113
5:13 278
5:17–25 20
6 26, 27, 61, 120, 242, 245, 249, 261, 283
6:6–11 111
6:7–11 273
6:10–12 20
6:12–23 287
6:12–16 273
6:12–15 275
6:13–16 281
6:14–15 286
6:14 59, 217
6:15–23 260
6:16 114, 275, 279
6:17–20 59
6:17 287
6:19 70, 278
6:20 56, 217, 287
6:21 276, 279, 287
6:22 61, 280
6:23 62, 261, 276, 280
7 27, 33, 89, 92, 113
7:8 32, 48
7:11 48
7:12–16 89
7:13 48
7:15 23, 90
7:16 48
8:2 74
8:4 74
8:17–18 28
8:17 27
9–20 10, 26
9 114, 245, 284
11–12 165, 166, 168, 197, 250
11 3, 172
11:1 118
11:15 191
11:21 11, 166
11:25 11, 18
12 3, 171
12:1–4 168

12:3 245
12:5–6 168
12:5 5
12:7–12 168
12:10–11 255
12:10 12
12:11–12 12
12:11 255
12:13 12, 167, 168
12:14 12
12:15 12
12:16 12
12:18 12
12:19 12
12:23 12
12:24–25 254
12:24 13
13–14 107
13 13, 115, 255
13:3 37
13:10 70
13:33 14
13:36 14
13:38 14
13:39 14
14:10 113
14:13 113
14:14 24
14:28–33 256
15 107
15:4 35
15:7–8 30
15:9 50
15:17–29 19
15:17 20, 29
15:19 21
15:21 24
15:23 28
15:25–26 30
15:25 20, 34
15:26 31
15:27–28 34, 35
15:28 35
16 129, 245
16:1 42
16:3 26
16:5–14 117
16:5–13 26
16:14–23 123
16:20–23 297
16:22 257
17:17–21 36
17:31–58 123
18 26
18:2 26
18:5 15, 26
18:22 15, 16
18:23 16
19–21 245
19 129
19:1 16
19:7 17
19:10–20:22 115
19:16–24 117
20 117
20:1–2 113
20:3 257
20:25 27
20:26 27
21 33
21:1–14 116
21:8 261
21:17 36
21:19 112, 137
21:20 35
21:21 35, 37
22 111
22:15–17 118
23:1 175
23:3–4 122
23:29 25
23:34 297
24 191
51:4 Eng 167
51:6 167

1 Kings
1–2 10, 258, 301
1 255
1:1–4 211, 213
1:4 214
1:5 214
1:17 52
1:35 122
2 129, 242
2:1–4 88, 91–94, 98
2:2–4 93, 117
2:3 88
2:4 88
2:13–18 214
2:26–27 28
2:27 28
2:28 28
2:39–40 26
3:3 86
3:14 117
5:12–13 145
8:31 168
9:4–7 98
9:4–6 90
9:4–5 117
9:4 86
9:5 90, 98
9:6–7 90
9:7 90, 98
11:4 86
11:6 86
11:9–10 86
11:33 86, 117
11:38 86
14–15 243
14:8 86, 117
15:3–5 117
15:3 86
15:4 99
15:11 86
16 107
16:2 117
18–20 107
18:17–40 295
21 107

2 Kings
2:3 122
2:5–9 88
3:13–20 140
14:3 86
16:2 86
18:3 86
22:2 86
23:26–27 99
24–25 86
24:9 93, 97, 99
25 243
25:6 91
25:27–30 87, 88, 91, 92, 95, 98, 99, 126

1 Chronicles
3:17–18 93
5:34–38 27
8:33–40 130
9:35 130
10:14 130
11:31 25
12:29 130
15:25–29 260
15:27 277
15:29 261
20:6 35
21 109, 191
25:3 140
26:28 130
29:23–24 109
29:28 110

2 Chronicles
8:16 109
13:7 279
15–16 243
20:14–23 140
36:14–16 109
36:17–20 109
36:21 109
36:22–23 109

Esther
2 76
2:6 129
4:1–2 299

Job
6:6 49
12:20 49
42:1–6 100

Psalms
2:4 158
3 153
7 153
18 153
23 175, 179–82, 184, 245
23:1 184
23:2–5 176
23:2 32, 176–78
23:3 176–78
23:4–5 178
23:4 177
23:5 177, 178
23:6 177, 178
34 153, 159
34:8 49
34:9 49
42 31
49 141
49:14 141
51 153, 163–67, 171–74, 188, 197, 201–203
51:1 195, 254
51:2 195
51:4 203
51:4 Eng 168
51:5 201
51:6 168
51:6 Eng 170
51:7 195
51:7 Eng 170
51:8 170
51:9 170
51:10 254
51:14 201
51:14 Eng 169
51:16–17 Eng 171
51:16–17 201
51:16 169
51:18 Eng 172
51:18–19 Eng 172
51:18–19 171
51:19 Eng 171, 172
51:20–21 172, 173
51:20 172
51:21 171, 172
52 153
54 153, 155, 156, 159
54:2 156
54:3 Eng 156
54:4 Eng 156
54:5 156
54:7 Eng 156
54:9 156
56 153, 155, 157
56:1 Eng 157
56:2 157
56:2 Eng 157
56:3 157
56:5 Eng 157
56:6 157
56:6 Eng 157
56:7 157
57 153, 155, 157, 159
57:4 Eng 157
57:5 157
57:7–11 Eng 157
57:8–12 157
59 153, 155, 158, 160
60 153
63 153
72 164

84 31
89 89, 92
89:28–37 89
89:31 89
89:33 90
89:38–51 98
89:38–39 98
89:49 98, 99
108:1–4 Eng 157
108:2–6 157
119:66 49
132 89, 90, 92
132:11–12 90
132:18 280
137 143
142 155, 156, 159
142:3 Eng 155
142:4 155
142:4 Eng 155
142:5 155
143 153

Proverbs
1–9 40, 50, 53
1:9 52
1:20–33 48, 53
1:20 44
1:29–32 51
4:1 50
4:6–9 53
4:20 50
5:1 50
5:7 50
7:4–5 53
7:24 50
8:2 44
8:14–16 48, 53
8:15–16 44
8:17 53
8:32 50
9 53
9:1–6 53
9:2 43
9:5 43
9:13–18 54
11:22 49
26:16 49
31 52
31:18 49

Song of Songs
8:7 266

Isaiah
1:21 34
11 32
32:9 32
32:18 32
39 96
39:6–7 95
54–56 96, 97
54 96
54:1 96
55:3 96
56 96

Jeremiah
1:5 132
3:1 264
7:9–10 224
13:18–19 95
13:18 94
13:19 94
22:28–30 93–96
22:28 94
22:29 93, 99
22:30 93
24 95
24:6 95
25:11 224
29:2 94
29:5–6 97
29:6–7 95
29:6 96
29:7 94, 99
40–43 243
48:11 49
51 211
51:7 211, 224
51:8–10 225
52:31–34 93, 95

Ezekiel
1–2 216
17:16–21 97
17:22–24 97
18 97
18:19–20 97
34:23–34 97
34:23–24 97
40–48 216
40:44–46 141

Zechariah
8:23 129

Malachi
2:14–16 270

APOCRYPHA/DEUTERO-CANONICAL BOOKS
Judith
1:1 128
4:3 128

NEW TESTAMENT
Matthew
26:39 178

Mark
6:45–52 246
10 126
12:26 127
12:36 126

Luke
1:16 127
2:25 127
2:31 127
2:34 127
3:31 127
7:45 127
13:34 127
18 126

John
4:25 131

Acts
1:1 126
1:3 126
1:6 126
2:14–36 127
2:22 128
2:29 127, 128
2:30 127
2:34 127
3:12 128
5:35 128
7 125
7:23 128
7:27 128
8:12 126
9 124
13 125, 126, 130
13:7 126
13:9 125
13:13–41 132
13:16 128
13:21–23 124
13:22 203
13:36–37 127
14:22 126
19:8 126
20:25 126
21:28 128
21:39 127
22:3 127
22:7 125
22:13 125
26:14 125
28:23 126
28:31 126

Romans
1:3 131
1:16 127
2:9 127
2:10 127
2:17 127
2:28 127, 128
2:29 127, 128
3:1 127, 128
4:6 131
9:4 128
9:6 128
10:12 127
11:1 128
11:9 131
14:17 132

1 Corinthians
4:20 132
6:9–10 132
9:20 127, 128
9:21 128
9:22 128
13:11 189
15:24 132
15:50 132

2 Corinthians
3 205
11:22 128

Galatians
1:1–24 124
2:14 127
3:28 127
5:21 132
6:16 129

Ephesians
4:24 188

Colossians
3:5–11 188
3:11 127

1 Thessalonians
2:12 132

2 Thessalonians
1:5 132

2 Timothy
2:8 131
4:1 132
4:18 132

Revelation
14:8 225
18:3 225
19:2 225

HOMERIC HYMNS
Hermes
482–88 141

AUGUSTINE
De doctrina christiana
2:39–40 196
2:60 196

INSCRIPTIONS
KTU
1.4 V 27–30 276

Index of Authors

Ackerman, J. S. 14, 16
Adams, A. 189
Adams, L. O. 146
Aggleton, P. 215
Aichele, G. 288, 289
Aldrich, R. 210
Alt, A. 67
Alter, R. 4, 85
Amit, Y. 39, 291
Anderson, A. A. 164, 167, 169, 171
Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury 204
Asad, T. 188
Asher-Greve, J. 226–28

Bach, A. 38, 48, 52, 53, 241, 243, 248, 249, 256–58
Bailey, D. S. 214
Bailey, R. C. 12, 67, 69, 74, 166, 253, 258
Bal, M. 190, 262
Barber, A. 204
Barbosa, R. M. 215
Baró i Cerqueda, J. 243, 247, 249, 251, 252, 254, 256–58
Barringer, T. 208
Barton, J. 88
Bayle, P. 204, 205
Béze, T. de 196
Beggs, C. T. 97
Bentzen, A. 280
Berlin, A. 38, 277
Berman, R. 217
Berridge, J. M. 93
Beza, T. 196, 200, 201
Biddle, M. E. 43, 45
Bieringer, R. 129
Birch, B. 38, 39, 48, 50
Black, F. C. 289
Blanton, W. 197
Block, D. I. 94, 97
Blount, B. K. 67
Blumenberg, H. 194, 196
Blumhofer, E. 289
Boccaccio, G. 226
Bodi, D. 276, 277, 285–87
Boer, R. 223
Bohrer, F. 226
Both, A. A. 140
Bottigheimer, R. 241, 250, 255, 258
Braun, J. 137, 139, 144, 147
Brecht, B. 229, 232–35, 237, 238
Briggs, C. A. 172
Briggs, E. G. 172
Bruce, F. F. 125
Brueggemann, W. 95, 100, 113, 136, 137, 165, 167, 274, 279, 286
Bruner, J. 105
Burckhardt, J. 194
Butler, J. 71, 278
Butler, T. 73
Buttenweiser, M. 173
Byron, G. L. 66

Calvin, J. 199, 201–203
Calvino, I. 165
Camp, C. V. 53
Campbell, A. F. 73, 75, 77, 79, 87
Cannon, K. G. 66
Caquot, A. 23, 25, 28, 32
Carr, D. 105, 107
Childs, B. S. 87, 88, 154, 164
Clines, D. J. A. 175, 261
Collard, J. 210
Collon, D. 142, 150
Comstock, C. 72
Conroy, C. 4
Cooper, E. 208–10, 212, 221–23
Cross, F. M. 28, 92

Cruise, C. 209–11, 216–18, 221, 228
Cummings, B. 194
Cushman, B. W. 290

Dahood, M. J. 172
Dalglish, E. R. 164, 166, 167, 169
Dalziel, E. 209
Dalziel, G. 209
Davies, P. 126
deClaissé-Walford, N. 163
Derrida, J. 194, 195
Dever, W. G. 85
Diefendorf, B. B. 189
Diepold, P. 95
Douglas, M. 275, 284
Dube, M. W. 282
Duchesne-Guillemin, M. 139
Dunn, J. D. G. 124
Durrant, S. 108

Eaton, J. H. 167, 169–71
Eichmann, R. 140
Eissfeldt, O. 96
Erlenwein, P. 289, 292
Eskenazi, T. C. 261
Esposito, D. 209
Exum, J. C. 241–43, 248, 249, 251, 255–58, 260, 278, 295

Falk, B. 215
Felder, C. H. 67
Ferrari, R. 210, 215, 227
Fewell, D. N. 39, 44, 63, 73, 104, 120, 166, 214, 291
Filemoni-Tofaeono, J. A. 290
Finkelstein, I. 164
Fokkelman, J. P. 11, 20, 25, 28–30, 32, 34, 35, 37, 276, 277, 279
Fontaine, C. R. 144
Ford, J. E. 210, 214
Foucault, M. 74
Fowler, R. M. 289
Fox, E. 26, 29
Frank, A. W. 106
Franklin, J. C. 140, 141
Fretheim, T. E. 214
Frymer Kensky, T. 109, 292, 296, 297

Galpin, F. W. 138
Garanderie, M.-M. de la 193
Garsiel, M. 43, 72, 73, 78
Geertz, C. 104
Geisendorf, P.-F. 188
Gerstenberger, E. S. 164
Gide, A. 220
Gillingham, S. E. 163
Gomes, P. J. 69
Goodman, A. 193
Goss, R. 67
Goulder, M. D. 164, 166, 169–73
Grafton, A. 192, 193
Granowski, J. J. 88
Green, B. 40
Greenberg, D. F. 209, 223
Greenblatt, S. 188
Guest, D. 67–69, 71
Gunn, D. 10, 16, 19, 22, 26, 31, 33, 34, 39, 42–44, 46, 47, 50, 63, 73, 78–80, 104, 111, 117, 120, 123, 136, 138, 166, 188, 190, 214, 223, 231, 240–42, 251, 255–58, 274, 277, 281, 285, 295

Hadley, J. 147, 148
Haenchen, E. 125
Halpern, B. 20, 26, 27, 40, 42, 85, 274, 281, 286
Harris, G. 227
Harvey, D. 280
Harvey, G. 128
Hastings, S. 245, 249, 251, 252, 254, 256–58
Heard, R. C. 165
Heller, J. 190, 289
Helminiak, D. A. 69
Hermisson, H.-J. 94
Hertzberg, H. W. 79, 136, 251, 258
Heym, S. 247, 258
Hickmann, E. 140
Hilton, T. 215
Hobbs, T. R. 41
Holiday, H. 214
hooks, b. 278
Horner, T. 223
Hossfeld, F. L. 169, 173

Hourihane, C. 212
Houston, G. T. 228
Hyde, M. H. 214

Isasi-Diaz, A. 66

Jakobsen, J. R. 188
Janzen, W. 40, 45
Jardine, L. 193
Jennings Jr., T. 67, 70, 277
Jobling, D. 35, 38, 45, 46, 104, 105, 107, 138, 229, 233, 235, 239
Johnson, L. 290
Johnstone, B. 105
Josipovici, G. 280
Joyce, P. 97

Kedgley, S. 283
Keel, O. 145
Keller, A. H. 168
Kelley, S. 67
Kelso, J. 291
Kessler, J. 300
Keys, G. 11
Kidman, F. 282, 283, 285
Kim, U. 107, 113
Kiralfy, I. 226
Kirkpatrick, A. F. 164, 170
Klein, R. W. 46, 49
Knoppers, G. 28, 87
Kolsteren, S. 209
Kraus, H.-J. 165–67
Kristeva, J. 124

Laird, D. 111
Lambourne, L. 215
Lancaster, R. N. 215
Landy, F. 36, 259
Lapsley, J. E. 97
Lasine, S. 116
Lawergren, B. 138, 139
Lawlor, J. I. 294
Layard, A. H. 226
Lévi-Strauss, C. 31
Lee, A. C. C. 291
Lefebvre, H. 276, 279
Leithart, P. J. 51
Leonardo, M. di 215
Leupold, H. C. 164, 167
Levenson, J. D. 40, 42, 46, 47, 52, 90, 92, 94, 95
Liew, T. B. 67, 68, 282
Linafelt, T. 120
Lindgren, T. 120
Lipiński, É. 51, 52
Lockard, R. A. 210
Long, B. O. 227
Longman, T. 164
Lorde, A. 68
Luther, M. 198, 199, 202

MacKay, A. 193
Macchi, J.-D. 87
Malina, B. J. 127
Manuel, F. E. 204
Martin, J. 226
Masenya, M. 67
Matthews, V. H. 46, 49
Mays, J. L. 164, 165
McCarter Jr., P. K. 5, 12, 14, 18, 19, 22, 23, 25, 27, 32, 35, 37, 72, 73, 80, 137
McConville, J. G. 87
McCreesh, T. 53
McKenzie, S. L. 8, 9, 85
Meylan, H. 189
Miles, J. 100
Miscall, P. D. 77, 108
Moor, J. C. de 87
Müllner, I. 247, 259
Münsterer, O. 230

Na'aman, N. 20
Newsom, C. A. 66
Neyrey, J. H. 127
Nicol, G. G. 251, 259, 293, 301
Noll, K. L. 7, 8
Noorthouck, J. 204
Noth, M. 67, 91, 274

O'Brien, M. A. 87
O'Kane, M. 247, 259, 289
O'Rourke Boyle, M. O. 39, 50
Ochberg, R. 105

Oesterley, W. O. E. 167, 168
Offringa, B. 242, 243, 246, 249–51, 253, 257, 259
Olyan, S. 28, 70, 221

Pardes, I. 36
Parker, R. 215
Peele, G. 230
Peleg, Y. 70
Pellegrini, A. 188
Person Jr., R. F. 87
Phillips, G. A. 288
Pinsky, R. 85, 101
Pollefeyt, D. 129
Polzin, R. 3, 5, 23, 26, 27, 29, 33–35, 75–78, 273, 280, 287
Prettejohn, E. 209
Pritchard, J. B. 139, 142, 143
Proudhoun, P.-J. 227
Pury, A. de 87
Pyper, H. S. 241, 259

Rad, G. von 86, 87, 91
Reddie, A. G. 292
Renan, E. 101, 107
Rendtorff, R. 165, 173
Rettig, J. 226
Reynolds, S. 209, 210, 212, 215–17
Ringe, S. H. 66
Robert, P. de 23, 25, 28, 32
Robinson, J. 214
Rock, L. 243–45, 251, 252, 254, 257, 259
Roemer, M. 119
Roemer, T. 87
Rofé, A. 21
Root, G. 226
Rooy, H. E. van 87
Rosenberg, J. 102, 112, 114–16, 118, 286
Rosenblit, B. E. 168
Rosenstock, B. 274, 276, 280, 286
Rosenwald, G. 105
Rosner, E. 283
Rost, L. 290
Rue, V. 289
Russell, L. M. 66

Saenger, P. 188
Said, E. 226
Sandberg, H. A. 210
Saslow, J. 210
Schearing, L. 87
Schneider, M. 200
Schroer, S. 40
Schüssler Fiorenza, E. 66
Schulz, A. 4, 9
Schwartz, S. 129
Scott, J. C. 105
Segovia, F. D. 289
Seitz, C. R. 96
Seow, C. L. 273, 274, 276
Seymour, G. 210, 212, 218, 224, 225
Shields, R. 275, 276, 285, 287
Silberman, N. A. 164
Singer, I. B. 269
Slomovic, E. 154, 164
Smith, J. Z. 31
Smith, L. T. 281
Smith, M. S. 284
Soggin, J. A. 73
Soja, E. W. 278, 282, 283, 286, 287
Solomon, S. 217
Sowards, J. K. 198
Spector, J. J. 227
Stansell, G. 39
Steenbrink, K. A. 301
Steinkühler, M. 243, 247–51, 253, 256–59
Steussy, M. J. 85, 168, 172
Stone, K. 67, 72, 74, 75
Strauss, L. 105
Sugirtharajah, R. S. 281, 282
Summers, K. M. 190

Tamez, E. 67
Tate, M. E. 171
Ter, L. 106
Terrien, S. 164, 168
Tolbert, M. A. 68

Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, F. 129
VanderKam, J. C. 6, 8
Vassallo, W. 292
Velde, H. te 146

Walsh, R. 289
Wanegffelen, T. 189
Weems, R. J. 66
Weiser, A. 168, 173
Welby, T. E. 215
Wernik, U. 70
West, M. 67
Westermann, C. 73, 163, 165, 169
Williams, D. J. 124
Willis, J. T. 275
Wiseman, D. J. 39, 50
Wolff, H. W. 91
Wotherspoon, G. 210

Yeo, K. 67

Zarek, O. 233
Zehnder, M. 70
Zenger, E. 91, 169, 173